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TALES OF THE MOUNTAINS

OR SOJOURNS IN

EASTERN BELGIUM.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

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LONDON:
WILLIAM PICKERING.
1851.

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THE MOUNTAIN HOME.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW days after the events recorded in the last chapter, Aunt Nel, Alice St. Clair, and your faithful servant as *chaperon* and body guard, having strolled out across the *Montagne de Flandre* (of the interesting associations connected with which I have more to say by and bye) towards a favourite nook we had ferreted out in our rambles on the road side to Aywaille and Aix la chapelle, which commanding an uninterrupted view of the fine range of mountain and woodland country between Embourg and Tilff, was our usual

resting point, down we sat to recover breath and enjoy the delicious scene around us.

It had often happened while spending an afternoon in pleasant chat or with an entertaining book here, that some young fellow countryman, hurrying away past us as fast as post horses could drag him on his way to Spa or the German Frontier, struck with the sweet features and graceful figure of Alice St. Clair, would lean forward or poke his head out of the carriage window, and gaze with evident wonder and admiration, as long as, sometimes a little longer than good breeding strictly warranted, at the beautiful mountain maid; and then would a scarcely audible sigh escape her bosom, as she thought perhaps, naturally enough, of those gay and joyous scenes to which all the world seemed hastening but herself.

It was these occasional glimpses, I do think, at some of nature's noblest creations—these momentary but inspiring realizations of what "her young fancy had no doubt so often painted him," that did more to set at nought the

young Chevalier Furiosus's blandishments, than all Mrs. St. Clair's well meant but rather too pointed insinuations and inuendoes. But it must not be imagined by this that Alice St. Clair was otherwise than happy—no—no! Alice loved her home—as well she might—for was it not all that the heart could desire? Hadn't she the best—the most tender and indulgent of parents—a perfect pattern of an aunt—brothers that idolized her—servants that almost contended which should first do her bidding? yes! she would have been the most ungrateful of girls if she had not been happy; but this life was never meant to be a state of perfection, nor H—— a paradise complete. Well, we had scarcely taken our seats on the thick velvet turf that carpeted our chosen bower, and unanimously agreed that it beat all the emerald triumphs of Axminster, or of the looms of Persia, either; when a travelling Britchka, drawn by four panting perspiring beasts, on the backs of which, in their jack boots, scarlet jackets, and black glazed broad brimmed *chapeaux*, lolled two

lubberly Liége post-boys, cracking their whips as they dragged up the hill, for the pleasure, I suppose, of hearing their own noise and the pretty echoes it created, approached us.

"Off to Aix," said I, "for a crown."

"Ems, for a guinea," suggested Aunt Nel, putting her glass up to her eye. Aunt Nel wore an eye glass—though I'll bet my head she saw much better without it.

"How delightful!" sighed Alice St. Clair.

"Baggage enough, by Jove!" said I, "for a trip to the Holy land."

"A Knight's bearings on the panel—English all over," pursued Aunt Nel, as the carriage rolled past us within twenty yards, and an exceedingly handsome gentlemanly looking young Englishman of military cut, leaning out of the window contrary to all rules of politeness, kept his eyes riveted on Alice St. Clair's blushing face, till a turn of the road hid her from his sight.

"Heigho!" ejaculated Alice, "how very delightful!"

"Exceedingly pleasant for you, Miss Alice,

I haven't the slightest doubt," observed I, "to monopolize all the admiration—I don't wonder at Aunt Nel looking so straight down her nose."

"I cannot stop any longer here," said that justly incensed lady, "to be a foil to any one; and, Mr. Alan, I insist on it that you don't stuff my pupil's head with such ridiculous vanities—and Alice, my love, you really must lay aside that outlandish Swiss hat, or well we may have the eyes of every one on us. I must say, candidly, that he *was* a remarkably good looking fellow; though rude to an excess; I am sure I have seen his face before."

"I wish Papa would take us for a treat some day to Aix or Baden," interrupted Alice, "it would be so delightful!"

"Mr. Alan must try to persuade him," assented Aunt Nel.

"I'll have at him, if I live, before I sup to-night," said I;—and so I did, as soon after our return home as I saw a favourable opportunity; the result of which was that he faithfully promised me he would sleep on it.

Now, I haven't the shadow of a doubt but that the image of the handsome young Officer in the yellow Britchka was flitting before Alice St. Clair's eyes for the remainder of the day; nay, I have the best reason for knowing that she actually imparted to Ninon in strict confidence; and Ninon immediately afterwards also imparted as a profound secret to Aunt Nel—that she had never beheld any one so much to her taste in her life—that, to use her own comprehensive language, "he was the beau ideal of what a nice young man ought to be." So, she fell asleep that night, no doubt, thinking of him; the consequence of which was, as often happens in similar cases, Miss Alice had a dream, as Ninon subsequently reported—and a fearful dream it was. She dreamt that she was wandering alone across the *Montagne de Flandre*, and had just reached the spot called *Le jardin Anglais*, or the English graves, when the clashing of swords, as of two persons engaged in deadly conflict, caught her ear. She rushed forward—when to her dismay she beheld two Cavaliers plung-

ing at each other with the most determined ferocity. She was about to throw herself between them, when the lifeless body of the handsome young stranger in the yellow Britchka fell at her feet, weltering in his blood; and a shout of demoniacal triumph from his adversary echoed through the mountains, as, approaching her and throwing himself on his knees, he cried, "Now thou art mine—mine; Alice St. Clair—for ever mine;—behold thy Furiosus!"

Now, frightful dreams have pretty much the same effect on most young ladies—they play havoc with their slumbers—keep them late in bed, and when they do make their appearance at the breakfast table, the roses have sadly departed from their cheeks; and so it was with Alice St. Clair:—she looked woefully pale when she took her chair opposite her father at the morning meal.

St. Clair was at his wits' end to conceive what ailed his darling girl:—perhaps she had sat up too long of late—or the air of the valley was too confined for her—or she had caught

cold—or the rock mellon had disagreed with her;—change of air would no doubt, as Aunt Nel suggested, do her good—he had thought of taking her a trip to the sea side, or up the Rhine."

Nothing could possibly have harmonized more with every one's wishes—so, after due and deliberate consultation, all fell into Mrs. St. Clair's proposal—"that St. Clair, Aunt Nel, the Invalid, and Mr. Alan, should start off, in as short a space as it might take to pack up portmanteaus and bandboxes, for Aix; there give the waters a trial;—if beneficial, to leave well alone, and defer the projected Rhine tour for another season."

There was so much good sense in this, that it was received, as I said before, *nemine contradicente*, as they say in the House of Commons, and to Aix it was, therefore, resolved that we should go;—Mrs. St. Clair declaring, in answer to my expressions of regret that she would not be prevailed on to make one of our party, that "she wouldn't give a *sous* to go any where except to Old England, where

she heartily hoped and trusted they might all be safe and sound before that day six months."

From what small causes do important effects result. Had a drop or so of rain fallen and prevented our visit to "the bower;" had we lingered on our way to scramble after blackberries, or gather the mushrooms that grew in abundance about the *Montagne de Flandre*—had we been, in short, a moment too late, or a moment too soon, we might never have seen the yellow Britchka—poor Furiosus had then not been eclipsed—Miss Alice would have been spared a terrible dream—her fond father would never have missed the roses from her cheeks, and the chances are, we should have all been pursuing our usual peaceful avocations at home, contented and happy, instead of flying away post haste in search of health and felicity in other climes. They say that everything is for the best—we shall see by the sequel if it proved so in the present instance. For my own part, I am not so sure that everything *is* always for the best, in the sense in which the expression is often used—

at all events this I do know, with respect to the fickleness of the fair sex, which shall never have a word of encouragement from me if I can help it, that there was one fair damsel at H——, who, before she had turned her back on the young Chevalier, would have thought twice first, and no simpleton either, whether she might not go further and fare worse. But this is entirely *entre nous.*

Arrived at Aix, after as propitious a journey as sensible people — determined to be pleased with every thing, ever enjoyed; Ninon established in the rumble to look after the traps, and nothing much out of the common to record, *en route,* except an unusual pensiveness in Aunt Nel, which the non-arrival of a *ne plus ultra* "consolable," expected that morning from Madame Violet's, might have induced for the first stage or two—as St. Clair whispered me, *sub rosâ,* and with good reason, the delight of Alice St. Clair was so excessive, as at last to call forth grave remonstrances from her father; but all to no purpose—on she went, like a mad girl, laughing,

and vociferating, and rejoicing, till Aunt Nel was obliged to take her seriously to task, and declare, if she went on in that extravagant manner, they must turn back again, or be looked on as dangerous characters by the *Gendarmes*. This only increased her mirth, as, for the life of me, I couldn't get up a solemn phiz, my heart dilating with pleasure to witness the genuine unsophisticated happiness of the Mountain Maid; so, we were glad to get, as fast as practicable, installed for the nonce out of observation, under the hospitable roof of the *Grand Monarque;* when, giving full scope to her joy, there was no help for it but to join in chorus, although at the imminent risk of being reported, by our staid decorous landlady Madame D——, as undoubtedly suspicious characters, to the police.

Aix was crowded, and hardly a lodging to be got, they said, at the *Grand Monarque* for love or money; but, sallying forth in good earnest, and resolved neither to be too squeamish nor covetous, we succeeded next day

in securing a very fair suite of six rooms on the same flat—*salon, salle à manger,* four dormitories—Aunt Nel and her pupil occupying the same chamber—and a *cuisine,* &c.:—so far well. And now commenced a life which, whilst its novelty lasts, and money is plentiful, especially to a young and beautiful woman who has hardly ever been, for years, more than five miles from her own chimney-piece, must have charms indeed. From morn till night existence would seem in a German watering place to be dedicated but to one object—pleasure; and if there is one point on which every one you meet appears to be unanimous more than another, it is the determination to have as much of it as possible. What with music and promenading, gossiping and gambling, flaunting and flirting, picnicing, dancing, and eating and drinking; the senses are in a perpetual whirl of intoxicating excitement from morning till midnight; and well is it for the gay votaries of pleasure, when they bid adieu to Aix and its fascinations, if they have lost nothing more precious than their money.

Nineteen times out of twenty, things *do* happen contrarily in this life. I can't stop now to enquire, with that philosophical spirit which the importance of the subject demands, how this is?—all I know is, things do seem very often at cross purposes: but there are bright exceptions—and it really did appear that everything should conspire to leave nothing to be desired by us on this Alice's first visit to her Cousins German. In came St. Clair two days after our arrival—his eyes beaming with gratification, to announce the no less important fact, than that he had just stumbled, at the library, on his old friend Lady Lucy Hamilton, and her son Duncan, as handsome and gallant a young fellow as there was in her Majesty's service. They were in lodgings in the next street, and he had promised to bring us all to take our coffee with them that evening.

Now, a worse hand at depicting anything in the shape of a scene of love at first sight, there cannot be than myself. I have often tried hard at it; but it won't do—I should

fail, were I to attempt it, to inspire even Ninon with a tender throb, which is an extinguisher to any ambitious hopes I may ever have formed of appearing before an enlightened and discriminating public as the author of the "last new novel;"—so, feeling sensibly my deficiency, which is peculiarly oppressive at this moment—such an opportunity for a hit, could I avail myself of it, seldom turning up, I must leave it to the imagination of the reader to conceive, as I lack the power to describe it, what must have been Alice St. Clair's emotion, when, on entering Lady Lucy Hamilton's drawing-room, who should be there standing, *in propriâ personâ*, but the identical handsome young Officer, and no other, who had set her blushing up to the ears by so rude a manifestation of his admiration, from the yellow Britchka. The recognition was evidently mutual, and, any one with half an eye could see, as mutually agreeable. Duncan Hamilton, almost doubting the evidence of his senses, saw before him the beautiful Mountain Maid, of whom he had never ceased thinking, from the moment his eyes first met

her's; and Alice St. Clair was not only fully confirmed in her first impression (first impressions certainly are very often correct) that, without exception, he was the *beau ideal* of what a beau ought to be, but, no doubt, inwardly thanked her stars a thousand times, that her dear, dear Papa and Aunt Nel had come to a place so certain of benefitting their health as Aix la Chapelle.

I have been told, but whether I ought to mention it hardly know, that, before Alice got into bed that night, she spent at least an hour in an ineffectual endeavour to finish, for her maid's approval, a little profile sketch of "somebody that had wonderfully taken her fancy," she said; but, somehow, she couldn't please herself at all. After looking at it for several minutes, and turning and twisting it this way and that, Ninon ventured to ask if it was intended for Monr. Furiosus? whereupon, her young mistress, snatching it away in a pet, tore it in pieces; and calling her "a ridiculous simpleton," threw the fragments into the fire-place, and wished her good night.

As to Duncan, before he could compose

himself to slumber, he had come to the resolution of pumping his mother next day, as to the advisability of carrying his purpose of selling out into execution with the least possible delay. After having just served with his regiment abroad for five years, and returned to the enjoyment of a handsome independent competence, left him at the death of an uncle, with very considerable expectations in prospect; serious thoughts of exchanging his red coat for a Nicols' *paletot*—taking unto himself a wife, when he could find one worthy of him, and settling down as a gentleman at large, had more than once occurred to him; but never had they assumed so palpable and determined a character, as when his enraptured gaze first encountered the lovely being that seemed to be the realization of all his fondest dreams. "Yes, he certainly would pump his mother next day, as to the propriety of becoming a settled character, getting spliced, and standing for the County. Alice St. Clair —by George! she was something like a woman—what an exquisite *contour* of face; what

expression in those soft blue eyes, what melody in her voice, what sense, what propriety in all her remarks; and what an exquisite figure, and hand and foot! and, at the death of her uncle, old Sir Giles Aubrey, whose pet she was, there was no knowing what she might come in for—yes—catch him going with them to Dublin—no, no! Alice could not be more than eighteen—what a fancy Lady Lucy seemed to take for her—The St. Clairs were one of the first county families in England—A monstrous pretty widow, too—that Aunt Nel—must get into her good graces—That sly fox, Alan, had an eye in that quarter, or he was mistaken:" and so, falling asleep, Master Duncan no doubt remained, if we may judge from the tone of his meditations, in a perfect state of the most enviable bliss till next morning.

"He is never going to give us a description of Aix," methinks I hear the reader say; —no, no, dear reader, never fear—Heaven forbid I should ever be guilty of such an enormity. As well write a chapter on the topo-

graphical history and resources of Cheltenham or the Isle of Thanet.

Not but that I could say a word or two, if I liked, even on a theme worn almost threadbare like Germany and the Germans; but this must not be the place for it: hereafter, should these slight random sketches of Belgian recollections warrant the attempt, it is not impossible, with the little Doctor's assistance, that I may some day have a tale or two to tell of out of the way scenes, which, although overlooked—because they are unknown or difficult of access to the generality of English tourists, in their eager one-minded flight along the beaten tracts marked out for them by their predecessors, are many of them, nevertheless, not a whit inferior in topographical beauties, or traditional and legendary interest, to the majority that even the far-famed Rhine or Moselle can boast of.

Nor is it my purpose to note down the ridiculous mad-cap goings on of two such simpletons as Duncan Hamilton and Alice St. Clair; in other words, to tell a tale which, in

one shape or other, has been told thousands of times before.

Will not every one that takes any interest at all in this narrative anticipate that, before a week, they were over head and ears in love with each other? and so it was in good sooth. Whatever some crabbed, croaking, unsentimental, matter-of-fact people choose to say, there certainly *is* such a thing, even in these cold, calculating, practical days, as love at first sight. I'm as sure of it as I breathe; and of all places on earth, there is none, perhaps, better calculated to fan such an incipient flame into full force as a German watering place. In sober truth, it is a most dangerous place wherein to trust together two loving hearts, unless with the full sanction of Papas and Mammas, or under the immediate direction and *surveillance* of such an intelligent *Cicerone* as Aunt Nel.

In the present instance, whether that sanction was accorded or not, it was pretty evident there were no great difficulties in the case: matters seemed to be taken for granted;

and, as St. Clair was bound to do the agreeable to his old friend and *quondam* flame, Lady Lucy, whom he had not seen for many years; and as, somehow, Aunt Nel and myself were never better pleased or more edified than in each other's company, the youngsters had it pretty much all to themselves; and no two young hearts, seemingly, could profit more by the opportunities thus afforded them to make downright boobies of themselves, which is letting them off, I take it, very easy. The natural consequence of which was, that no doubt every thing was settled and arranged; Heaven only knows even, perhaps, to the selection of the *trousseau* itself, before ever such a thought as matrimony—for at least two years to come, had entered St. Clair's head.

Where Aunt Nel's thoughts could have been all this time always puzzled me: she must have known what was going on very well, so, it was quite ridiculous for her to utter an exclamation of amazement and horror, when Duncan one day having sworn, with more asseverations than I choose to put down

here, that he had overheard Mr. Alan say—a sly dog!—"she was the handsomest little woman in Aix,"—ventured to make a free, full, and particular disclosure of the state of his own heart; winding up with a terrible intimation, that, "if the slightest opposition were offered to their union, they had come to the unalterable resolution to die by charcoal."

Poor Aunt Nel! it was too late to pretend to pull a long face, and talk of the wickedness of this world; so, the upshot was that Duncan had not only enlisted her safely in his service before he had done, but made her promise him to use her influence with Mr. Alan, forsooth! who was to be made to promise to exert all the weight of his interest with Mr. St. Clair; and all for what? to spare two noble families such a blot on their escutcheon, as the disgraceful exit of a couple of romantic self-willed young noodles—scions of the illustrious houses of St. Clair and Hamilton, by charcoal; who, instead of being sympathized with and encouraged, as I told

Aunt Nel in pretty round terms, ought to have been regarded as poor creatures—*non compotes*—and treated accordingly.

Aunt Nel, however, had passed her word to Duncan, and agreed to do all she could with her brother, provided he wouldn't plague her any more about Mr. Alan. As for Alice, building on the benevolence of her father's heart, which had never denied her anything in reason, she dreaded no insurmountable difficulties to her union with the son of his old friend, if Aunt Nel and Mr. Alan were brought over—as soon as Duncan had sold out and all other necessary preliminaries were satisfactorily adjusted.

As the Autumn was so far advanced, St. Clair had not intended to make a longer stay this time at Aix than a fortnight or so; but, delighted with the re-appearance of the roses on his darling's cheeks, and charmed with the society of the Hamiltons, he had willingly yielded to our entreaties to keep the apartments for a month certain. Lady Lucy never felt better, and Duncan; although deaf to

all his mother's solicitations to drink the waters, was the picture of health and happiness: for myself and Aunt Nel, for I always managed to keep as close to her side as possible—not a wish had we unfulfilled, except that the time devoted to "long vacation" would not pass so quickly.

So, it was not till after the month that any determination was come to of a return homewards; when it was agreed that Lady Lucy and Duncan should pay a flying visit at the Chateau, on their way to England; after which, Alice was to spend the winter at Clifden Hall.

Some apology, I feel, is due to the reader for thus hurrying him to so interesting a place as Aix, and back, without hardly giving him time to look about him; far less judge, by any thing I have shown him, whether it deserves the high commendations lavished on it by some travellers; but the truth is, my present purpose was simply and solely to relate, in the way it happened, the circumstances of an introduction, which however unimportant in

themselves, had so great a share in the future welfare and happiness of my Pet of pets, as to appear to my partial eye second in consequence to no affair under heaven; and I would willingly persuade myself into the hope—a matter not wholly uninteresting to the reader.

I have this comfort, that, for a few shillings he can procure, if required, more valuable and varied information of all that is worth knowing of Aix and its attractions, great and small, than anything I could have written; and with this conviction made apparent at little cost, will be free I think to grant, that, in referring him to Mr. Murray, I have consulted his interests much more than my own credit or convenience.

Well then, after taking a tender farewell of Aix—which we had all such good cause to remember with gratification—to the delight of Mrs. St. Clair, who, greatly to her credit, had not uttered a word of complaint or even impatience during our absence, we were all landed in tip-top spirits safe and sound at

the Chateau—Lady Lucy declaring, in which she was vehemently seconded by Duncan, in spite of my winks and short cough, that "search the wide world round, no lovelier spot could be found wherein to nestle, than among the woods and mountains of H——."

CHAPTER XV.

THE first visit next day was in a body to Bachelor's Hall. The little Doctor was in raptures—having since we last met obtained his heart's desire. A full remission of all past offences had been granted to the petition of his friends. No longer an exile, (O that harrowing word to the soul of a true patriot!) he was a free and fearless man to wend his way whither he would; but, like so many others alas! a great portion of whose lives has been spent in banishment, when the long pined for liberty arrived at last, he seemed still to linger, as if loath to quit for ever scenes which almost endeared to him by long usage—appeared to have become necessary to his happiness.

"Why not, before you return for good and aye to fatherland," said I, "come and have another look at us in Old England. St. Clair cannot hold out much longer—Lady Lucy and Duncan have had a hint—you shall have a wood fire and a corner to yourself—that I'll warrant; and a drop of "the dew" I'll engage, from Mount Bevis itself—genuine as imported."

"Yes—yes!" replied Rodolph, making a wry face as if he were trying to swallow something in his throat, "all in good time—but first there's a debt of gratitude, you know, that must be paid; and then—there's a tear to be shed over the graves of the poor old man and woman who left the exile a parent's blessing—'twas all they had to give. Then the old hearthstane!—But, never fear—please God all goes well—Francois Rodolph will come and drink a glass of whisky punch with you all some day in the *bel pays de liberté*. So now, *allons!* and see my grand hobby, which, *entre nous*—as a proof of gratitude, I've left with my collection of fossils to my country: *Non omnis moriar*, eh?"

A treat of the first order was the inspection that now followed of the Rodolph museum; which, for its extent, was unexceptionably the most curious and complete I ever saw, and must have been the work of years. Would that I had the ability and space to do it justice! The Doctor was in his element, as may be supposed, and his guests all in the best possible humour to be edified. Lady Lucy won imperishable laurels by the extraordinary knowledge she evinced on the various subjects of antiquarian interest submitted to her notice; and Duncan, too, dropping a pertinent word now and then in the right place, came in for a considerable share of the Doctor's good opinion; although—as a new rival in the field—it is hardly to be supposed that he could expect much favour or consideration. So, when, at last, having seen all there was to be seen—traversed every nook and corner of the grounds over and over again—paid due homage to Rodolph's seat, and unanimously agreed that it was a spot worthy of its name, back we all strolled together to dinner; the

Doctor declaring, before he took leave that night, "that Lady Lucy was a credit to her sex and country," or words to the same effect;" but, as for Master Duncan, let him look sharp out—for he was never more deceived in his life if he thought he was going to be done out of his betrothed with impunity so easily—not he.—No—no!—he had cut off one nose already, and if Master Duncan prided himself, indeed! on his handsome face, he would have him consider, before it was too late, how he would like to go about for the remainder of *his* days—*minus* his proboscis?"

"I dare say you wonder, Duncan," said St. Clair, as one day we were strolling together round the shrubberies, "how we manage to kill time at H——."

"After the good old fashion, I suppose," replied Duncan, smiling, "watching the grass grow; shying stones at the blackbirds under the gooseberry bushes, and settling the affairs of your neighbours. Gad! though—who the deuce is that queer looking fish in the raspberry bushes yonder—*he* seems—don't he, to

have something better to do just now than shying stones?"

"O, don't you know him?" laughed St. Clair, "old Sauvigné's son and heir, our next door neighbour."

"Yes, and rich as Crœsus, too," added I maliciously, "and a monstrous admirer of Miss St. Clair."

"Of Alice St. Clair, Sir?" exclaimed Duncan, turning as red as a turkey cock, and addressing himself to her father.

"Yes—so they say, Duncan—what then?"

"Oh nothing, Sir, he shows his taste—that's all."

"Just what I was thinking myself," acquiesced St. Clair.

"And Miss St. Clair, Sir?"

"Is the *penchant* mutual, do you mean?" interposed I—"Lord, Duncan! who's to fathom the depths of a woman's heart?"

"Upon my word I never enquired," said St. Clair, "they say he's a very steady fellow, and will come in some day for at least forty thousand."

"*De gustibus*, Sir, that's all—*de gustibus*—. If Alice admires such a Simon Pure as that!" fired Duncan, "I can't say much for her taste—that's all."

"Heavens and earth!" cried I, "Simon Pure? why, he's as furious, they say, by nature as by name."

"He looks particularly formidable, don't he," sneered Duncan, "in that bed gown and brickdust moustache?"

"He don't think small beer of his moustache, though—I'll warrant," said I.

"*De gustibus*—is Alice partial to carroty hair, my dear sir?"

"As I live, Duncan," replied St. Clair solemnly; "she never told me; but now I think of it—the heads of some of her water coloured sketches *have* a tendency to auburn."

"Well, but you don't call that clown's moustache auburn, sir?" vehemently demanded Duncan, "brickdust, sir, brickdust! I should be ashamed of such an attempt."

"Hush—don't talk so loud," whispered I, as we approached the spot where, on the other

side of the hedge that divided Monr. Sauvigné's gardens from St. Clair's, standing among the raspberry bushes—the young Chevalier was industriously engaged adjusting his "attempt," as Duncan profanely called the most killing moustache in H——, with one hand, while he stuffed himself with the fruit around him, as fast as he could carry it to his mouth, with the other.

To St. Clair's salutation he raised his cap gracefully; but fire flashed from his large goggle eyes as he encountered Duncan's searching gaze. It was but a momentary passing glance, but in that one glance was conveyed, as palpably as language could have expressed it, the challenge of mutual enmity and defiance.

On the evening following this *rencontre*, a public Concert—grand as grand could be! was to be given at Liége; at which every family of any rank within a radius of ten miles was expected to be present. Of course our Chateau party had taken care to secure tickets; and now ensued an animated discussion,

whether Aunt Nel could with propriety make her appearance in a place of public entertainment in Widow's weeds. Mrs. St. Clair declined giving a positive opinion; "She could only judge what she would do if Mr. St. Clair, which God forbid! were taken from her." Lady Lucy "thought the two cases hardly parallel—besides which; a Concert—the major part of which according to the programme, was to be selections from Handel—Haydn, and other sacred composers, was very different from an Opera house, or Ball room."

Duncan perfectly coincided with his mother —" If he were Aunt Nel, he would wear the Widow's weeds till she changed them for the Orange blossom; for they became her amazingly." St. Clair " thought she had wept quite enough for such a scamp as that De Montville, and would be a great noodle to give him another thought—and, as to propriety—it was not as if Madame Violet had made a fright of her, as Duncan said."

The Doctor—who was always called in in any case of emergency—" had no hesitation

in saying that, were the Countess De Montville his sister, he should leave it entirely to her own excellent judgment to act in so delicate a matter as her feelings guided her; at the same time, his dear friend Mrs. St. Clair would see, as Lady Lucy had fairly put it, that Handel's music was quite a different sort of thing to Strauss' Valtzes. It was entirely a matter of feeling:—what said Mr. Alan?"

"He—Doctor Rodolph, must be satisfied *I* was the last man in the world to give encouragement to any impropriety;—but, after due consideration and perfectly agreeing with him—Dr. Rodolph, that it was entirely a matter of feeling rather than anything else, I felt free to admit that for my own part *I* had but one feeling on the subject:—and when I remembered that my own grandmother by the father's side—one of the strict—staid—formal old school of the third George's time—within three months after my grandfather's demise—"

"*Tenez—tenez!*" vociferated the Doctor, "if that's the case—there's not another word to be said about it. What a strict—staid formal

old lady of the third George's correct times could do—no one else need be squeamish about—so, that's settled, thank Heaven!"

"Amen!" responded I; and Aunt Nel looked as if she would have said as much if she dared.

Never did Alice St. Clair, simply attired in a plain white muslin dress over a satin slip —without an ornament except a bouquet of choice flowers at her side, and a wreath of little button blush roses in her hair—look more lovely than on that night; when, leaning on Duncan Hamilton's arm, she entered the brilliantly lighted Concert room, radiant with health and beauty. Every eye was on her and the handsome young Englishman—her favoured *chaperon.* They were in truth the beheld that evening of all beholders. Mrs. St. Clair and Lady Lucy looked like two Duchesses; St. Clair the perfect picture of a gentleman; the little Doctor and myself never better; and as for Duncan, his triumph was complete! as he caught the eyes of the young Chevalier narrowly watching him dur-

ing the Concert, as if he could have slain him.

The entertainment was over; and the company assembled in the ante rooms scrambling for hats and cloaks and shawls, when Duncan, who had been in quest of the carriage, returning through one of the *salons* to rejoin us, suddenly thought he heard his name mentioned by a party of young Cavaliers talking and laughing together in a recess close by. Stepping behind one of the pillars that ran the whole length of the room on either side, that he might escape observation, he listened for a moment; when he was confirmed in his first impression by again hearing his name distinctly repeated in a jeering tone by one of the quartette, whom he presently recognized as no other than his rival the young Chevalier Furiosus; coupled with some allusions to his intimacy with Mademoiselle St. Clair, which it was quite impossible to let pass unnoticed. Any mere personal affront from such a quarter he would hardly have deemed worth notice; but to breathe the name of Alice St. Clair with aught approaching to levity or

disrespect in his hearing was quite another matter. In an instant all the fire of the Hamiltons mantled his brow, as stepping forward and touching the young Chevalier on the shoulder, he demanded to know "if the remarks he had just overheard fall from his lips were, as he conceived them to be, intended for himself and Miss St. Clair?"

"If Monr. Hamilton had overheard anything disagreeable to the extreme sensitiveness of his feelings, he must lay the blame to popular rumour.—Monr. Formose Sauvigné could not be responsible for the *on dits* in every one's mouth."

"Was Monr. Sauvigné willing immediately to retract what he had just said, which he must have known, when he gave it utterance, was false and scandalous?"

"Monr. Formose Sauvigné had nothing to retract."

"Then!" cried Duncan, "if you are not a poltroon as well as liar—follow me;" and hastily leading the way to the street, he continued on till he reached an unfrequented

alley, where it was not likely they would be observed. "Now," cried Duncan, "if you are a man, defend yourself—no weapons better, for the nonce, than those with which nature has supplied us."

"Not here—not here," stammered Furiosus—turning pale, and retreating a pace or two from the clenched fist within twelve inches of his moustache—"Gentlemen, Monr. Hamilton, do not fight with their hands. As early as Monr. Hamilton pleases to-morrow morning—rapiers or pistols—*c'est égal à* Monr. Formose Sauvigné—day break at Chévremont—on the little flat near the chapel of Notre Dame, if perfectly agreeable to Monr. Hamilton—and it could then be proved which was the poltroon, Monr. Duncan Hamilton, or Monr. Formose Sauvigné."

"With all his heart!" assented Duncan, "and he must be further indebted, by the bye, to Monr. Formose Sauvigné, for the obliging loan of a rapier for the occasion; for, by Jupiter! he hadn't the remotest idea yesterday of such an honour in store for him as a

meeting next morning with so renowned a Chevalier as Monr. Formose Sauvigné."

"Monr. Formose Sauvigné had two swords exactly alike—twin brothers—made by the same *artiste* — either should be perfectly at Monr. Hamilton's service. Possibly, Monr. Duncan Hamilton might be also unprovided with a friend as Second—if so—"

"Monr. Hamilton was extremely obliged, but would, for the nonce, be quite contented with his servant Tom, who had been out several times before while in the employ of Major O'Blundergrowl. He would be proud, however, to avail himself of Monr. Sauvigné's handsome offer of the rapier; and would do himself the honour of waiting for him at day break at the place appointed."

"Monr. Formose Sauvigné was laid under everlasting obligations to Monr. Hamilton, and begged now to wish him *bon soir*."

"Monr. Hamilton heartily wished Monr. Formose Sauvigné the same."

Matters being so far satisfactorily arranged, Duncan hastened to rejoin his friends, who

one and all of us were getting rather fidgetty at his long absence; especially as Mr. St. Clair's carriage had been stopping the way a pretty considerable number of times. After a suitable apology for keeping the ladies the gaze of all the moustached young bucks in the lobbies for nearly twenty minutes, we were soon going a good round Flemish trot on our way to H——; the Doctor in high dudgeon at "the whimsical idea," as he called it, "of advertising such an affair as a *Grand* Concert, which in Allemagne would scarcely be deemed tolerable at a third rate benefit." Otherwise, the ride home passed without anything worth recording, except that Duncan was not quite in his usual spirits; but as Lady Lucy attributed it to the oppressive heat of the rooms, she took no further notice of so unusual a circumstance in her son, which at another time would have filled her with apprehensions; and we all separated for the night without a misgiving of anything beyond a trifling head ache being amiss, far less of the terrible doings that were to set all our hair standing

on end before breakfast time next morning, except Alice; who, for no cause that she knew of, was sensible of a peculiar depression of spirits that night—a sadness and sinking of the heart wholly unaccountable; and there was a certain tearful expression of the eye—a thrill in her touch, and a faltering of the voice as she pressed her lover's hand and wished him good night, that went straight to Duncan's heart, and made him almost repent of the foolish and perhaps fatal engagement to which he was now irrevocably pledged.

But regrets were useless—the die was cast—there was no receding. It was not that he felt any concern for self—no—no—but only for her whom he loved far far beyond his own life, a thousand times told. "Hadn't the conceited coxcomb dared to offer insult to a sweet, harmless, unoffending girl under his protection, and now almost allied to him by the closest ties? By Heaven—yes! and he would chastise him or perish in the attempt;" and with this laudable resolution, Duncan rang for his valet.

"Tom," said he, after a silence of some minutes, while he was undressing himself, "Tom, I've a little affair of honour on my hands—to come off, Tom, before breakfast to-morrow."

"The devil you have, sir?"

"Tom, no doubt you've heard talk since we came here of the old merchant's son next door—Formose, or Furiosus as they call him, with the brickdust moustache and goggle eyes—would you believe it, the puppy has first had the assurance to cast sheep's glances, confound him! at Miss St. Clair, and then to insult her, Tom, in my hearing? and I'm going to give him a thrashing for it."

"Serve him right, sir!" responded Tom; "but it's my opinion—excuse me, sir—you're clean demeaning yourself, sir, to go out with the like of him. Why, did you never hear, sir, of his fine amour with the beautiful Maid of Vaux. Lor, sir! he's a precious Turk—is Master Furiosus—it's the best bit of fun you ever heard in your life."

"Let's have it, then, Tom," said Duncan,

sitting contemplatively down on the bed-side, as one not unwilling to have his mind diverted from unpleasant reflections.

"Oh, didn't you ever hear that, really? well, *I am* surprised, Mr. Duncan."

"Go on, Tom—cut it short."

"Well then, Sir—about two years ago, more or less, Master Furiosus went a courting to the beautiful Maid of Vaux, as they call her, the richest heiress any where, by all accounts, between here and Liége; made proposals, and was to be spliced in less than a week; when the old boy—Miss's governor that is—being told, on the sly, that his future son-in-law liked blue eyes better than brown, remombered that Lilie the kitchen maid's eyes were as blue and bright as the sky itself; so, what should he do from that moment but keep a sharp look out; till one day, having shut himself up in a cupboard, he overheard a little confidential chit chat which wonderfully opened his eyes, and pouncing out upon the terrified lovers, pretty soon showed them the outside of his doors.

The old people tried to bolster it up, but it wouldn't do at any price. Miss was not one, by all accounts, to stand any nonsense. He waylaid her in her garden, and threw himself at her feet, and swore he would go and drown himself in his father's fish-pond; but she spurned him, they say, from her like a real heroine; and writing a full, true, and particular account of the case to her cousin—a young lieutenant in the Brussels' *Guides*, Master Furiosus was obliged to make himself scarce, till the rage of young leather leggins was cooled."

"You don't say so, Tom?"

"Fact, sir, every word of it," continued Tom—"but the best of it's to come. It soon got wind, in course, and was every body's property, till, coming to the ears of one of the wandering minstrels that travel, they say, hereabouts during the summer, spouting and singing extrumporaneous effusions—as Ninon calls them—he thought no doubt it would be a dainty dish for his next benefit in the gardens of the *Hôtel des Bang*."

"*Hôtel des Bains*, you mean, Tom," mildly interrupted his master; "I can never get you to pronounce that word right, Tom."

"More's my misfortune, sir:—well, as I was saying — the Improvisitator, as Ninon calls him, got wind of it, and a rare joke he made of it all over the country. Ninon, somehow, got a copy of the ballad, and she and Master Fred, who, Ninon says, is a poet born, putting their heads together, soon turned it into plain English—and here it is, too," added Tom, chuckling with glee, as he produced a folded sheet of paper, with infinite delight, from his pocket-book, and handed it to his master.

Duncan, although in anything but a poetical vein just then, desired Tom to read him by all means Fred's performance, "and to be careful to mind his stops and not make a mess of it."

Thus encouraged, after a few preliminary observations and apologies, Tom drew the candle closer to him, snuffed it, and nearly threw his master into a fit with laughing, in

spite of the anxious tenor of his thoughts, by the following humorous little *morceau*, entitled—

THE FAIR MAID OF VAUX; OR, THE RECREANT'S FATE.

" In a bower where the soft acacias spread
Their emerald boughs—where roses red,
And jasmine white, and harebells blue,
And the brier and honeysuckle grew;
And all that was loveliest in nature did bloom,
Filling the air with their sweet perfume;
In a bower where angels themselves might say
It were bliss indeed to pass life away,
One eve the Lady Ada Renaire
Sat weeping—the fairest of the fair!
Softly murmured the Vesdre,—before her rose
Famed Chèvremont's mount, where the pilgrim goes
To offer his vows at the hallowed shrine
Of St. Hubert, or holy St. Katherine.
As the maiden sat in her bower that night,
Little she deemed that a brave young Knight,
Come with long travel weary and faint,
To kneel at the shrine of his patron Saint,
Was witness to her sad lament,
While her sighs and tears to his heart's core went,
As her hapless lot she did bewail,

And told to the night winds her doleful tale.
"Ah, woe is me—false—perjured youth!
That my fond fancy pictured the soul of truth;
Foul, faithless traitor! and dost thou dare
Thus to play with the love of a child of Renaire;
To slight the smiles of Vaux's fairest maid,
To whom nobles themselves have their homage paid,
For the sake of a base-born scullery jade?
By our Lady! if there's valiant Knight and true
In Vaux, this insult the caitiff shall rue;
Though the sword of the meanest groom's too good,
I ween, to be stained by such recreant blood."
"Why weepest thou thus, fair Maid of Vaux,
Why so fast down those cheeks do the tear-drops flow?
Has the false Furiosus his vow forgot,
That he pledged at the shrine by St. Otho's grot?
O, Ada Renaire—O luckless maid!
By the false Furiosus to be betrayed;
Base hound! thus to trifle with maiden fair—
The daughter of the proud Renaire:
By Heaven! such foul wrong, by the holy rood!
Can alone be wash'd out by thy recreant blood;
And when thy vile corse in its shroud is laid,
Who will weep for thee but a scullery maid?"
"Sir Knight! I pr'ythee, go—take thy sword,
Let it drink the churl's blood; and for thy reward,
If thy heart is as true as thy words are fair,
Thou shalt claim for thy bride Lady Ada Renaire;
For I swear by our Lady this hand to bestow

On the Knight that shall lay the base recreant low."
"Sweet Lady! as sure as in God is my trust,
Ere to-morrow the base churl shall bite the dust:
To sully my sword with the caitiff's blood
Would a foul stain be, by the holy rood!
But I'll lay at thy feet, or my name's not Mc. Marsh,
His Lady-love's glory—the villain's *moustache!*"
"'Tis enough, Sir Knight—agreed—agreed!
To shed the churl's blood were no knightly deed—
So, may God and our Lady the good cause speed."

"And now don't you think, sir," continued Tom, folding up the paper and replacing it carefully in his pocket-book, "that it's too much honour for the like of such a snob to go out with a born gentleman?"

"Very true, Tom," approved Duncan, "but, don't you see, too, I have pledged my word?"

"Then there's nothing for it," soliloquized Tom, "but to make the best of it; and put him out of his pain as quick as possible. But I should have thought—excuse me, sir,—that a taste of the fisty cuffs would have answered every purpose; or, if you had rather not soil your hands, couldn't you leave him to me,

and I'd engage to read him a practical lecture he wouldn't forget in a hurry."

"Thank you, Tom, that's a lesson I must this time teach him myself."

"But how the deuce, sir, you are to fight without weapons, puzzles me?"

"Oh, nothing could be civiller than the Chevalier—I am to have the choice of two of his own *rapiéres*, genuine Toledos, no doubt: we shall see what metal they are made of, Tom."

"And what would Miss Alice say, sir, and my Lady, if they knew it?"

"Talk about something else, Tom; zounds! what are you looking so straight down your nose for, as if you were going to a funeral?"

"And like enough I may be," replied Tom, gravely, "before I'm many days older. No offence—sir, but I don't relish those swords."

"You forget, Tom, I was a pupil of Angelo for three years."

"That makes a difference, certainly, Mr. Duncan; but give me pistols for gentlemen —swords for assassins."

"Twelve o'clock, by Jove!" cried Duncan—"now then—good night, Tom—have all ready—and I say, Tom, you'll see fair play; and — and — if I fall, you'll find a letter for Miss St. Clair in my portfolio — you understand—but recollect, not a word down stairs, as you value your life."

Having received his master's last injunctions, like a faithful servant, Tom descended with a troubled brow to the servants' hall; looking so long-faced and meditative, that Ninon, who had just left her young lady, and was perhaps imbued with the same pensiveness that seemed to pervade the whole household that night, started back as though she had encountered an apparition. The fact is that Tom had been entrusted with an important secret, and only looked as most persons do who consider themselves of indispensable consequence to their employers. It was quite evident to Ninon's quick perception that there was something extraordinary in the wind, and, with true female sagacity, she was not long in discovering that Tom's

thoughts were far too full to long hold to themselves all they contained, and determined she would not clap her head that night on her pillow, as she expressed it, till she was mistress of the whole mystery.

Now, since the arrival of Lady Lucy at the Chateau, courtships and love-making seeming to be the order of the day, Tom thought there would be no harm in his doing a little business in the same line on his own account. "In all his travels," Tom declared to every one, "he had never seen a spicier little figure, brighter black eyes, or a more tempting little foot and ankle than Ninon's." In fact, her attractions, both mental and personal, were so manifold as to completely overthrow all Tom's vaunted theories of single blessedness, and, before a week, he had come to the resolution to demand her hand in due form, and, furthermore, to make her in good earnest Mrs. Thomas Pringle on the very same day, please God, on which his young master led to the altar his beautiful bride.

It may be supposed, therefore, that when

Ninon made a vow to ferret Tom's secret out of him, she reckoned without a doubt on the influence she possessed in that quarter. Nor did she overrate her power—that's certain. How she went to work—what irresistible little arts and manœvres she brought into play,—what witcheries or devilries had recourse to to accomplish her purpose, is of little consequence; but, sure enough, before poor Tom could snatch the parting kiss that night, he had made a clean breast of it, and Ninon had been entrusted with the terrible disclosure—that a bloody duel was to be fought that morning on the little grass-plat by the Chapel of Notre Dame, between Mr. Duncan and Monr. Formose Sauvigné.

It is really fearful to contemplate the power of women over our sex. There is no resisting them when they are heart and soul determined to have the ascendancy. Many a stouter champion than Tom has found this out to his happiness or misery. As long as they wield their power to our advantage—all well—they can't well have too much of it;

but our fondnesses expose us to great risks sometimes—that every one must admit.

Now, if Tom—as a man, and a pattern of one as he thought himself, couldn't keep a secret, how could he ever expect inviolability from a giddy goose like Ninon; especially in a matter involving the dearest interests of a beloved young mistress? There's the inconsistency of man—just as if she wouldn't be sure to say to herself—"*Mon Dieu!* what would my sweet Mademoiselle Alice say if she knew of this dreadful conspiracy against her peace. What will she say to Ninon if her lover is brought home to her a corpse;—will she not say, I am an accomplice—his blood, will it not be on my hands? Yes—yes—not a drop of it shall be spilt if Ninon can help it:" and, so reasoning with herself, was it not natural enough for her to make her way with all possible speed to her young lady's room, and in less than five minutes put her in full possession of the whole tragical plot, with various additions and reflections of her own, by no means calculated to divest

it of its terrors? yes—indeed it was; and Tom, and no one but Tom, was accountable for the consequences.

"Don't cry, Mademoiselle—don't cry"—condoled Ninon, as the tears chased each other fast down Alice St. Clair's pale cheeks, as she sat on the bedside wringing her hands in an agony of mental misery."

"I will go this moment!" sobbed Alice, convulsively, "to Lady Lucy and tell her all—or to Aunt Nel—or Papa—or Tom shall go this instant to the Chevalier Sauvigné's—or I will go to him myself.—Oh!—Ninon, Ninon, tell me, tell me what is to be done?—he will be killed—he will—he will!".

"Not a hair of his head, now, shall be injured, Mademoiselle," replied Ninon, firmly, "if you will only be guided by me; but you must not take on so—crying don't do any good—the meeting must take place, as Tom says, who knows all about these things—prevent it to-morrow, as Tom says, it would only come off another day.—A duel, you see, Mademoiselle, is, as Tom says, an inevitable

event: it's no earthly use putting it off—like the day of payment it must come, you see, at last—so better, as Tom says, get it over as soon as possible. But I've been thinking of a plan to rout the enemy without bloodshed: only have a little courage, and if the young Chevalier don't show the white feather before cockcrow, my name shall never be Ninon Pringle:—so, now just wait a moment till I return;" and, so saying, Ninon slipped along the passage into her own room.

In less than ten minutes she returned enveloped from neck to feet in a sheet, so arranged as to have the appearance of a loose shroud or robe such as is worn by the dead: her long black hair was unfastened, and, thrown back from her forehead, hung down her back and shoulders; while some white powder sprinkled plentifully over her face and neck, made the semblance so striking, that Alice could hardly repress a slight shudder as she stood before her, and, in a sepulchral voice exclaimed,—"Lady, dost thou know me?"

"Truly," replied Alice, smiling through her tears, "thou art more like a spectre from another world than Ninon;—but wherefore this masquerading at such a moment?"

"Patience, my sweet Mademoiselle," answered Ninon—"this is no masking matter, believe me; only you must first promise to follow implicitly my ghostly directions, even should they require you to be the principal spectre in the scene."

"There is nothing I would not do in my power for *his* sake—that you know, Ninon."

"*Bon—bon!* well, then, now listen:—half an hour before day-break we must be on Chèvremont. We can easily hide ourselves, you see, in the shrubs near the little grass-plat where we lay out the dinner when we go picnicing on the mountain, you know:—well, a bundle will contain your shroud and the flour-dredger:—leave me alone for putting the finishing touches. Then, as soon as the two valiant Knights make their appearance and I say now; *attendez—voila!* you must rise just in this way—*comme cela,* as like a real appari-

tion as possible; and slowly and noiselessly —*comme cela,* approach the lists:—my head for it, before a blow is struck we shall be masters of the field. It is our turn now to play the ghost—mind that."

"But should we be observed—should it ever be known that we were actors in such a scene—O, Ninon! think of the scandal—the disgrace"—implored Alice.

"And O, Mademoiselle! think of the bloody corpse of your handsome lover, pierced through and through by the sword of the Chevalier, lying stretched on the mountain top weltering in its gore—think of that!"

"Oh, yes—I do—I do! but papa, what would he say—and mamma, and Aunt Nel, and Lady Lucy? O, no! Ninon, I must not—dare not do it."

"Then, *bon soir,* Mademoiselle, and may God and our Lady defend us!"

"Stay,—stay, O, Ninon—don't go—don't leave me: is there no other way? Shall he fall if we can prevent it? you say; no—no—to the world's end would I go and brave

every danger, rather than aught of evil should befall him."

Bon — bon! this time we need but hie us to the top of Chèvremont; so now, mademoiselle, you must try for an hour or two's sleep, while I keep watch and get all ready for the rendezvous, from which like conquering heroes we will all return to breakfast, or may I never live to be Mrs. Pringle."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE clocks were striking five, when two female figures, wrapped in large cloaks, might have been seen walking rapidly over the little bridge into Vaux, till, arriving at the extremity of the village in the direction of Chèvremont, they turned into a bye-path which led by a circuitous route through the woods to a zigzag track up the mountain, of difficult ascent, by pursuing which they could reach the Chapel of Notre Dame with much more privacy than by the ordinary approach. The pedestrians, whoever they were, pressed on as fast as the unevenness and almost perpendicular steepness of the road would permit; every now and then anxiously turning their

heads as if fearful of some interruption to their progress, till the path which they had taken plunging deeper and deeper into the thicket, they were completely hidden from further observation, and it was left to conjecture, to imagine where two young females of their evidently respectable appearance could be going, if not to their orisons, at such an early hour. At length, having accomplished the ascent of the mountain, they reached, nearly overspent with fatigue, the little flat of table-land, not more than ten yards square, on which they had so often spread their peaceful and happy repast on their oft repeated excursions to this pleasantest of picnic spots. Almost exhausted with the haste they had made, they sat down on the turf to recover their breath; for, owing to the rains that had lately fallen, the ascent of the mountain, at the quick pace they had come, was not achieved without considerable effort;—but they had little time for repose.

"Hark!" exclaimed one of them, the elder

of the two, hastily rising and running to the edge of the rocks to reconnoitre, "footsteps —*Mon Dieu!* they are coming—now, Heaven defend us!" saying which she hurried her pale and trembling companion into the midst of some thick bushes, where they could lie concealed and yet be observers of all that passed.

Hardly had they made good their retreat when the footsteps drawing nearer and nearer, in a moment or two Duncan Hamilton, followed closely by the faithful Tom, leaped up the bank, and stood panting and puffing on *terra firma*.

"Half past five," said Duncan, looking at his watch, "magnificent view this, Tom—by George! there's a study for a sunrise—people don't know what they lose by lying a-bed till eight o'clock."

"He don't mean, does he, any how," murmured Tom, after the lapse of a few minutes during which he continued pacing backwards and forwards blowing the tips of his fingers, and, with a most unhappy expression of countenance, venting his wrath on the heads of

all Belgians good bad and indifferent without distinction, "I say, Mr. Duncan, Sir—he never can mean to play false, any how; at all events he won't keep us kicking our heels on this cold, dreary mountain—and on an empty stomach, too, very long I hope?"

"Make yourself perfectly happy about that, Tom," consoled Duncan, smiling, "for here they come, by Jupiter!"

"Now, sir," whispered Tom, impressively, "don't get excited, what ever you do—that was how it was that the Major never missed his man. 'Tom,' he used to say, 'every thing's in taking it cool, and getting a right light.'"

"Monr. Hamilton, the tip top compliments of the morning to you—permit me the honour of introducing my friend Monr. Jerôme Bras—at you service."

"Monr. Formose Sauvigné and Monr. Jerôme Bras—your most obedient."

"Will Monr. Hamilton do Monr. Jerôme Bras the honour to make choice of one of these Toledoes—twins—not a pin to choose between them!"

"Monr. Hamilton was overwhelmed with the appreciation of Monr. Jerôme Bras' courtesy, and would be perfectly satisfied with Monr. Jerôme Bras' own choice."

"Really, Monr. Hamilton must have the complaisance to do Monr. Formose Sauvigné the honour to make his own election. Monr. Jerôme Bras had it, in especial, from Monr. Formose Sauvigné to insist on this favour being granted him."

"Then, Monr. Hamilton would no longer hesitate—he would avail himself of Monr. Sauvigné's handsome offer by taking this; and trusted that Monr. Jerôme Bras would not fail to convey to his principal the assurances of his *parfaite consideration*, &c. &c."

"Monr. Jerôme Bras would expire before he would fail to deliver Monr. Hamilton's obliging message. Was there ought else in which Monr. Jerôme Bras could be in any way of service to Monr. Hamilton?"

"Nothing — Monr. Hamilton was quite ready, if Monr. Formose Sauvigné were so, too."

"And now—one word, Monr. Sauvigné," exclaimed Duncan, as, taking a firm grasp of his weapon, he placed himself opposite his antagonist, "have you any wish to retract what you said in my hearing last night?"

"Monr. Formose Sauvigné, as he before told Monr. Hamilton, had nothing to retract."

"Then come on!" cried Duncan, and God show the right."

Hardly had the two valiant combatants taken their stand, and put themselves into a posture of defence, when a tall figure—white from neck to feet, with features deadly pale but of exquisite beauty, and hair of glossy nut brown hanging dishevelled down her neck and shoulders, suddenly seemed to rise as if from the earth, and with measured noiseless steps approached the battle ground. A cry of horror from Monr. Jerôme Bras, whose eye first caught the advancing apparition, caused his principal to turn his head; when, observing the spectral form behind him, his whole frame was seized with sudden trembling—his sword fell from his hand as if he were paralyzed:

"*Le spectre—le spectre—la Viérge—la Viérge!*" cried he, following Jerôme Bras, who was rushing down the mountain as fast as his legs could carry him; "*la Viérge—l'Evéque mon Dieu—mon Dieu!*" and fled.

"Staggered, as well he might be, Duncan stood as if rooted to the spot; while Tom's hair, as he himself afterwards expressed it, "almost lifted his hat off;" when, ye powers! the white robe in which the ghost was enveloped falling to the earth, who should stand before them but Alice St. Clair! Miracles would never cease—up rose Ninon, in obedience to her Mistress' invocation, a moment afterwards, to Tom's utter amazement, who continued staring, and rubbing his eyes, and staring as if he doubted the evidence of his own senses—till, at length, things assuming their natural forms, so extravagant was his joy, that, catching his intended up in his arms, but for a most resolute resistance on the part of that, justly incensed little model of a maid, there's no knowing whether he wouldn't have devoured her alive. The excess of his exul-

tation being somewhat abated, all was now explanation and wonder and merriment. The step said to exist between the sublime and the ridiculous was never more in danger than at that moment. The retreating forms of the discomfited foe pursuing their flight as if the devil himself were at their heels, was not the least irresistible feature in the scene; and long and loud were the peals of irrepressible laughter that now rang through the mountains. The cock had not yet crowed—the enemy was routed—the field fairly won; and what's of far more consequence than all the rest put together—Ninon had fully established in the estimation of every one her undoubted title to exchange, as soon as perfectly agreeable to herself, her present modest name for the much more patrician and euphonious one of Pringle.

As for Duncan, like a generous victor, he gave strict orders to Tom that not a word of the young Chevalier's defeat should escape his lips; adding that, "if he did his duty, it was not quite clear to him whether he ought

not to send him packing about his business for his scandalous *non* observance of his injunctions on a former occasion." Not a syllable, however, was to be dropped about the duel, as he thought Furiosus had been punished quite enough already. But it is a far more difficult matter than Master Duncan thought for, to stop the gossip of the servants' hall. Somehow, nobody knew how, the affair got wind, and soon was the talk of the whole neighbourhood; till, at last Tom brought in the intelligence that the young Chevalier had started off on his travels to some far off region, leaving his rival undisputed possessor of the field.

Here was a victory—as signal as it was glorious, and not a drop of blood spilt. Well might Ninon be proud of her generalship—*palmam qui meruit ferat*—and richly did she merit the congratulations that greeted her on every side.

Never will pass from my memory, if I live till a hundred, the breakfast scene on the morning of Duncan's triumph. I will venture

to say such a glorious termination of hostilities is unprecedented in the annals of history as it has just been my good fortune to record; but I must leave it to the imagination of the reader to do justice to the mingled emotions with which its announcement was hailed by us all; for describe them I can't. I thought Aunt Nel never would get over it, and despatched Tom post haste for the Doctor, lest she should really burst a blood-vessel with laughing, as Alice went through the ghost scene again by universal desire, and Ninon gave a lively sketch of the flying foe, with sundry whimsical *addenda* of her own that, in spite of Mrs. St. Clair's ejaculations and Lady Lucy's tears of gratitude, nearly threw us all into hysterics.

Duncan, that I must say, bore his honours with that modesty which is the surest characteristic of real magnanimity; and, setting to work in good earnest at the buttered toast and ham, afforded the most unequivocal proof of the salutary effects of early rising. Enviable in the extreme must have been Alice St.

Clair's sensations to see her lover sitting next to her the picture of health and enjoyment instead of—as she viewed him in her mind's eye but a few hours before—a lifeless corpse at her feet, "pierced through and through," as Ninon expressed it, "and weltering in his gore." As to Ninon herself, she was finely on stilts—and well she might be—for who but herself had planned the *modus operandi*, without which, instead of the smiling faces and merry hearts then and there assembled over the rolls and coffee that morning—it is harrowing even to think what might have been the scene. The Doctor was in high glee, and told his well known story of Herblay's nose with great *eclat;* but still persisted in his opinion, notwithstanding Mrs. St. Clair and Lady Lucy's visible repugnance, that "it was a pity the insulting puppy had escaped so easily: had it been only a slight flesh wound, or the loss of a nose or ear, or an eye, or finger or two—as a warning—but, *n'importe*, he was a silly conceited coxcomb, and 'too much honour was it for the like of him, indeed,' as

Tom said, 'to cross swords with a born gentleman.'

St. Clair said little, but, evidently, felt much. If there was one point on which he was more sensitive than another, it was being the subject of out of door scandal, otherwise, he would have taken it all as a good joke and laughed as merrily as any of us. For myself, I could scarcely conceal my delight—the realization of my best hopes I had no doubt was near at hand—chance had done more for us than all the arguments and philosophy of wisdom itself could have effected. Nothing in fact could have happened better to promote the end most desired than the events of the last twelve hours; and before the Doctor took leave that day—by making one and all of us a dead set at him, leaving him no loop hole out of which he could slip—pinning him in a corner from which his only chance of escape was an unconditional surrender; and, as he didn't seem to know what was good for him, constraining him to put himself under the care and guidance of those who did — we carried

the fort—our utmost wishes were fulfilled—the yet remaining days of life in H——, thank Heaven! were numbered.

"Who with a grain of self-respect would submit voluntarily to be the talk and ridicule of the whole neighbourhood?" as Aunt Nel said.

"Who indeed?" responded Mrs. St. Clair.

"It won't bear a moment's argument," sided Lady Lucy.

"I should think not," echoed Duncan.

"And wasn't it high time that Master Fred there," as the Doctor observed and explained too, to demonstration by asking him a question or two, at which he blushed up to his ears, out of Herodotus and Euripides, "was doing something better than learning Walloon, and scribbling nonsensical sonnets in his sister's album, if he ever meant to set the Thames on fire." And wasn't it high time, too, that Miss Alice should have a few finishing touches, in Bryanstone Square or the Regent's Park, in deportment—was it to be expected she could ever know how to step as she ought into a

carriage, or to dispose of her hands and elbows, or modulate her voice within the compass congenial with the rarefied atmosphere of refined society, by taking pattern from the belles of H——? And ought not her father, with his talents and opportunities, to be ashamed of himself to let the grass grow under him, when "if he would only know on which side his bread was buttered," as the old Chancellor said, and played his cards well, he might soon keep neck and neck with the best of them? "It wouldn't bear a moment's argument," as Lady Lucy said. So, the upshot of it all was, as I have already shown, poor St. Clair, taken by storm, was glad by free and full surrender to purchase his immunity from further "bullying," as he ungratefully termed the wholesomest advice he ever received in his life; though I'll bet a guinea, bullied as he was and badgered, he was never on better terms with his own heart than that day, however it might go against his pride all at once to own it.

The long vacation was drawing to its close;

but three days more holiday were left me before return I must to the old harness:—well, that was a thought that never chafed my spirit much. True—Heaven be praised! it was not all up hill work with me—my way was neither dreary nor my burden grievous. How I might have behaved, had it been otherwise, I can't tell. For a man with ample in his pocket, to have no misgivings when he wakes of a morning of his dinners forthcoming that day, to pretend to say how he would feel or act if the fact stared him in the face—that if his wits were insufficient to procure the needful supplies he must e'en beg, borrow, steal, or starve—is perfectly impossible. Necessity acts so differently on different dispositions, that it is the most difficult thing in the world to speculate as to what one would or would not do under extreme pressure. What one ought to do is quite another matter; nobody can be ignorant about that; but until I see the Archbishop of Canterbury himself—who every one supposes is or ought to be the best man in the world—reduced from his high es-

tate to the dreadful extremity of that wretched outcast shivering there at his gates, I shouldn't care to be too cock sure but that he too would prig a penny loaf if put to it. He can't say that he would not, that's all I mean. But there's this comfort as far as the public morality is concerned, that if he did, he'd get, as he ought, well trounced for it. It is just this reflection that makes me always more prone to give a copper to poor Lazarus, be his sins what they may, than to hand him over to the relieving officer. "Hand him over?" God help him—"Supposing," say I sometimes to myself, when the thought of the relieving officer, comes to my help, "supposing when my good dinner smokes on my table to-day I was to be "handed over" without tasting it till I deserved it better than this poor devil asking a crust of me? how dreadful! Right or wrong, then, Lazarus gets my dole—nor is my appetite for the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding ever diminished by any terrific misgivings as to how he will invest it: at all events we cannot be far wide of the mark, I take it, if we

feel a conscientious conviction of having done no more than what we conceive to be our duty. But I am wandering.

Can there, let alone all else, be a surer proof of a man's good sense than, if he has only three more days devoted to innocent enjoyment, to make the most of them. Would it not be sheer folly to sit down and mope and grumble because he cannot make them six? yes—yes—'tis just in this way that some people don't half enjoy their lives; they will not avail themselves of that which is at their command, because something unattainable and which, if they could have it, would be a vast deal more plague perhaps than profit, keeps them in a perpetual fret of discontent. So, I think I showed my philosophy in making as much as possible of the few happy hours yet at my disposal, before they were lost to me for ever. This I did:—what with one thing or another—paying farewell tributes to all that had so often ministered to my pleasure and edification—visiting probably for the last time scenes fraught with a thousand delightful re-

collections—taking more than one affectionate adieu of Rodolph's seat and its esteemed master—and settling and arranging for the speedy restoration to their rightful home and kindred of those dear forms I left behind, whose welfare was no less precious to me than my own—never did three days seem to take unto themselves wings and fly away so fast.

"Farewell—farewell!" repeated St. Clair, for the tenth time, as I took my place in the snug *coupé* of the Brussels *Diligence*, trying to talk and laugh as if my heart was as light as a feather; "farewell, Alan, my boy—Park street, if you can—if not, something snug in May Fair—you understand?"

"And a good long lease of it, too," said I, "yes, yes—leave that to me."

"Good bye, Mr. Alan," cried Fred, "don't be long before you write."

"And mind there's a spare bed-room," whispered Alice, "for my beau—the little Doctor, when he comes to see us, which he has promised me he will, if alive, next summer."

"*Au revoir,*" sighed Aunt Nel, with a squeeze of the hand, and something, as I thought, very like a tear-drop in her eye that went straight to my heart—"*au revoir*—we shall soon meet again:" and off rolling the *diligence,* I had not quite recovered that tear in Aunt Nel's eye, till, safely landed on father-land, it occurred to me what a simpleton I was, and that I had something else now to set about and think of than thrilling touches, and loving looks, and all such stuff and nonsense. So, to work I went in good earnest—the result of which was that one of the snuggest houses in Curzon street, within five minutes' walk of Lady Lucy's in Hill street, was all ready and waiting for the reception of Aubrey St. Clair-Esq. and family before that day month; at a rental, too, as they all agreed before they had been in it twenty-four hours, and hardly could have had time to appreciate its advantages, would never hurt them. So far well: my utmost wishes were fulfilled—every thing was faultless—nothing remained but that experience should

teach wisdom; and wisdom, ever the best counsellor, should henceforth direct and keep them in the right course: — that was all the ill I wished them.

"I'll take a round wager," said I one day to St. Clair, as we were sitting, after the ladies had left us, over our madeira and filberts, "that you don't desert us again, Aubrey?"

"No, no," said he, "there's not much fear of that; but I shall never think, Alan, of the Mountain Home, otherwise than with feelings of gratification. If it has left me little richer in pocket than it found me, it has at least taught me this lesson—that will last me for life — to stick, in spite of all discouragements, to the main chance—that's something gained, isn't it, even at my time of life?"

"There's not a doubt," assented I, "that a man's native soil is the best in which he can hope to flourish in perfection; if he cannot, or will not take root in that, the chances are he is but a worthless sort of plant, 'with more blossom,' as Dr. Johnson says, 'than fruit;' and what matters where he vegetates?"

"Talking of that, by the bye, Alan—what say you to calling on the Chancellor to-morrow? All Aubrey St. Clair now wants, my boy, to make him a happy man, is a few hundreds a year more, and plenty to do."

"G——'s birth would suit you to a T," said I, "mind your hits, and you're a made man, mark my words, before six months."

And so it turned out:—if an oracle had spoken nothing could have come truer.

Next day we paid our respects to the good old Chancellor; not long after which poor G—— went the way of all flesh and the highest ambition of Aubrey St. Clair was attained. He had quite enough employment to keep him out of mischief, and an income that made him, if possible, saucier than ever.

All of any interest that remains to be recorded is that, about twelve months after these events, an announcement to the following effect appeared in the fashionable journals, amongst the marriages—

"On Wednesday last, at St. George's Hanover Square, by the Rt. Revd. the Lord Bishop of London, Duncan Hamilton, Esq.

late of the ——— regiment, son and heir of the late Sir Duncan Hamilton, of ———shire, to Alice, only daughter of Aubrey St. Clair Esq. of Curzon street, May Fair; and niece of the present Sir Giles Aubrey St. Clair of ———Park &c. &c. After which, Alan Walter P—— Esq. of King's Bench Walk, Inner Temple, Barrister at Law, youngest son of the late Jonathan Bruce P—— Esq. of ——— Devon, to Eleanor Amy, Countess de Montville, only daughter of the late Aubrey St. Clair, Esq. of the same place. After the ceremony, the happy couples partook of a splendid *déjeûner* in Curzon street, at which most of the *élite* now in town were present. We hear from unquestionable authority that, at the death of the late venerable Sir Duncan Hamilton, Mr. Duncan Hamilton—the present representative succeeded to a clear rent roll of not less than five thousand a year."

One other event no less interesting than the foregoing, but of which no mention, that I know of, was made in the columns of the

Morning Post, remains to be here handed down, as it deserves, to posterity. I allude to the nuptials celebrated immediately subsequent to the preceding, between no less a person than Mr. Thomas Pringle, son and heir of Mr. Job Pringle—for more than twenty years confidential porter at the Swan with Two Necks, Lad Lane—and Mademoiselle Ninon Demol, eldest daughter of Monr. and Madame Demol, of the Faubourg St. Martin, Paris, *Marchands de Tabac.*

So now, dear Reader, farewell! till we meet again; and if you happen, like Mr. Alan to be a comely, warm-hearted, susceptible bachelor on the sunny side of forty, not indisposed to exchange the mercenary attentions of a wily housekeeper for the disinterested love and affections of a tender wife, I cannot wish you any greater happiness than that you may meet with as good a one as my Nel; for it is impossible you can find a better.

THE

PROPHETESS OF EMBOURG.

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CHAPTER I.

ON the summit of the *Montagne de Flandre*, one of the highest and, from its associations, most interesting of the many mountains in the romantic vicinity of Chaudfontaine, about two leagues from Liége, is a small flat of table land—about twenty feet square, on which stand four Fir trees.

The English traveller would hardly deem them worth notice, except for the singularity of their solitary appearance on such a spot; but his attention is riveted with peculiar interest when he is informed, that under their

shade repose the remains of two of his own countrymen, who charmed, they say, with their frequent visits to the mountain, during a sojourn in the neighbourhood, and the exquisite scenery it commands on every side, made a vow one day to be there buried at their deaths, side by side, and to provide sufficient funds for the planting and perpetual maintaining of four Fir trees over their graves.

An excursion to "*Le Jardin Anglais*," as the spot is called, is therefore generally one of the first visits made by the English tourist, who has been induced to turn out of the direct route to the more frequented, only because better known, scenes of the Rhine, to explore some of the unsurpassed beauties of Eastern Belgium, than which he will find few parts even of that far-famed river more variedly grand and picturesque.

"I have heard travellers often declare," says Mr. Addison, "Belgium to be a flat uninteresting country; admitting, indeed, that there were a few hills about Liége. The

tourist, who has only proceeded along the railroad from Ostend to Brussels or Antwerp, declares on the very strong testimony of his own eyes that this country has little or nothing, in the shape of fine scenery, to arrest his attention. From Liége he goes on in the night *Diligence* to Aix la Chapelle, and leaves one of the most charming and varied spots in the world wholly ignorant of its beauties. It is true, now that the railroad to Verviers is open, he must, in spite of himself, get a glimpse of the Alpine scenery of Belgium; but yet he has no idea of the many delights, if he be a lover of the picturesque, he has foregone by refusing to turn aside from the direct road to the Rhine—a river which he eagerly seeks to behold—wholly unconscious that he might, by another route, with the loss of only twelve hours, have seen her beauties rivalled, if not eclipsed."

But to return to our story. Words are inadequate to convey any conception of the magnificent prospect that bursts on the sight from the top of the *Montagne de Flandre*.

One stands enraptured, as the eye revels far and wide over a landscape which the happiest visions of the poet or painter never surpassed. Mountain over mountain, clothed with the most luxuriant foliage; rugged and precipitous cliffs, hanging like huge giants across your path, or overshadowing the water's edge; the stately *chateaux* of the wealthy Liégois, with their prim terraces and highly cultivated grounds, interspersed with the neat farm-houses and many-windowed white cottages of the peasantry; gentle sloping hills clad in richest verdure, and decked with rare shrubs and flowers to the river's brink; golden corn fields; fat meadows; orchards teeming with delicious fruits: — the lovely valley of the Vesdre, watered by its meandering stream, and stretching away beyond the mountains as far as the eye can reach — on every side the evidences of peace and plenty meeting the delighted gaze, altogether produce a combination of varied beauties — a *coup-d'œil,* which no language can do justice to. As the traveller stands enchanted with the beauties

around him, and lingers by the mountain graves of his countrymen, he feels a kind of reverence for the spot, and almost envies them their place of rest. Nor does he quit it without paying some tribute of respect to their memory, and breathing a prayer for their eternal rest.

In a country so famous for its historical recollections as this; where, almost at every turn, some startling record of heroic deed done, of chivalrous exploit, or of wrong sustained and fearful vengeance wrought, greets the eye and chills the traveller's heart; as a matter of course such renowned spots as sainted Chèvremont and the mountains in its vicinity are not without their traditions. Indeed, scarcely any portion of Belgium has been the scene of more terrible atrocities and excesses than the once turbulent province of Liége, or whose annals are stained with more tragical reminiscences.

Chèvremont, in particular, independent of the exceeding sanctity of its shrines, and the miraculous virtues universally ascribed to

them, and for which they are still sought by innumerable pilgrims, will ever be memorable for its once celebrated Castle—the scene of such disastrous struggles, but of whose ruins no traces even are now left.

On the road from Liége to Chaudfontaine, at the top of a lofty mountain, rising almost perpendicularly above the Vesdre, of arid aspect, and covered in part with rare shrubs, encircled by narrow paths of difficult ascent, and crowned by a clump of stately trees, within the sanctuary of whose hallowed shade still flourishes a small Chapel dedicated to the Virgin, stood the once famous Castle of Chèvremont.

"It is difficult," says De Gerlache, in his Histoire de Liége, "to conceive how on this narrow piece of land a Fortress could be erected, sufficiently capacious to enclose the buildings necessary for the accommodation of a powerful Lord, with his retinue and numerous garrison; in addition to which, at the time of the Norman invasion, a great number of fugitives, priests, and other religious

persons retired with all they possessed into the interior of the Castle or its dependencies, several churches happening to belong to it, richly endowed."

After sustaining several sieges with various success, it fell at last into the hands of Immon, a chief of a turbulent, cruel, and excessively ambitious character. Intrenched in this formidable position, he seems to have held all the adjacent country in terror by harassing the inhabitants, extending his predatory ravages even as far as Liége itself, carrying off the citizens, and putting them at ransom, till, at length chance afforded an opportunity to the Bishop for his overthrow, to accomplish which he had hitherto tried every means in vain. The Chatelain's wife had brought into the world a son, and great were the rejoicings at Chèvremont, every one seeming anxious to do honour to the new comer. "But on whom would the proud distinction of baptizing the noble infant be conferred? "he must be of the highest dignity in the church." The proposition was immediately

made by the Chatelain to the Bishop, who eagerly accepted it—to the joy and satisfaction of every one. A strange idea seems to have occurred to Notger—he hesitated, nay, endeavoured to repulse it; but the more he pondered on it, the firmer it got possession of his mind, till, at last he burned with ardour to see it realized. Having convoked the heads of the clergy with their vassals, he communicated to them his design, which was enthusiastically embraced. An oath of inviolable secrecy was taken, and, lest delay should endanger the success of the plot, the day, and hour, and rendezvous, were fixed and agreed on for the patriotic enterprize.

At the time appointed, the daring band well armed, and disguised beneath various church costumes—burning with desire to be revenged on the tyrant who had so long oppressed them—marched towards Chèvremont, singing psalms and anthems. Immon, who was ever on his Castle turret to observe what was passing in the plain below, perceived the long procession approaching, and loudly

extolled the zeal of the good Bishop who came to solemnize the baptism of his son and heir with such unusual pomp. He commanded the draw-bridge to be lowered and the gates to be thrown open; and the cohort entered in the most perfect order.

Notger, seeing his attendants ranged in the court, advanced towards Immon, and thus addressed him, "My Lord, this fortress is no longer your's—it is mine."

"What say you?" replied Immon, a fearful presentiment flashing across his mind:—"speak you seriously, Lord Bishop?"

"I say," repeated Notger, "that this fortress belongs to me—the only legitimate Lord of the country:—Immon, yield to the law of necessity; quit this place, and I will engage to make you ample recompense."

The Chatelain, whose suppressed fury almost choked him, could hear no more: "Oh!" cried he, "how fortunate you are to have entered this Castle on my parole; but you shall not quit it except in tatters—infamous, miserable little priest!—Fly — fly! if you

would not that a worse fate should happen to you;"—saying which, he called loudly to his followers; but most of them, nothing mistrusting, were dispersed in different directions, and Notger allowed them no time to re-assemble. Giving the signal to his men, off flew their surplices, mantles, and priests' hats; and nothing was to be seen but warriors in their casques and coats of mail with swords and battle axes in hand, who, falling on the inhabitants, massacred them without mercy. Immon, driven to despair, gained the top of the Castle, and threw himself from the battlements into the foss, where he perished; while his wife, in an agony of terror, precipitated herself into the well.

The essential purpose of this expedition was the total demolition of the citadel, of which not one stone was left on another. Nor were the churches or convents spared, as they would have probably drawn together other refugees, and given rise to a fresh reign of tyranny; but other churches were built at Liége and Aix la Chapelle out of their re-

venues which were very considerable. The destruction of this stronghold was everywhere celebrated with inexpressible joy.

But perhaps no event recorded in the blood stained pages of Liége's eventful history, as given with so vigorous and truthful a pen by De Gerlache, exceeds in cold blooded atrocity the barbarous assassination of the unfortunate La Ruelle, designated by some historians as "*le grand patriote, l'homme du peuple, l'illustre bourgmestre de Liége, victime du despotisme, &c.*"

On the 16th April, 1637, the Count de Warfusée paid a visit to La Ruelle, and invited him to dine with him on the following day. At the appointed hour, La Ruelle with two of his attendants, Nicolas and Jasper, arrived at the Count's house. Having dismissed Nicolas, he was received with Jasper, who was devotedly attached to his person, with the greatest demonstrations of friendship by the Count.

"Ah, my good fellow!" cried Warfusée, addressing Jasper, and pointing the way to

the kitchens, "We are going to have rare cheer to-day; you must join us in drinking long life and happiness to the Burgomaster La Ruelle."

Soon other visitors arrived — Marchand the Avocat, the Prebendary Nyes, the Prebendary of Kerkhem, the Clerk of St. Jean, and the Abbé de Mouzon, accompanied by the Baron de Saizan, a French nobleman, the Baroness and their son; all of whom were likewise greeted with the utmost respect and cordiality by Warfusée and his four daughters.

After the first salutations had been exchanged, the party descended to a large chamber or dining hall, the windows of which were heavily grated with iron bars, and having performed their manual ablutions—after the custom of the times—they sat down to dinner; Warfusée occupying a place near the door; Marchand the *Avocat* taking his seat next him, immediately opposite the Abbé de Mouzon and La Ruelle; the rest of the company sitting indiscriminately—as best pleased themselves.

The commencement of the banquet was enlivened by the greatest gaiety—the Count being in excellent spirits, drinking large draughts of wine, and endeavouring, by his example, to induce his guests to do the same.

"In such good humour am I to-day," said he, "that, by St. Lambert! we will have a glorious carouse, friends, before we part;" then calling for two large fluted glasses, and addressing the Abbé de Mouzon, "To the health of the most Christian King," continued he, drinking off the contents of one: "pledge me, Monr. l'Abbé," added he, raising the other to his lips, "This to the health of King Louis the Just."

Nothing could exceed the mirth and conviviality of Warfusée during the progress of the first course; but towards its close his manner changed—he became thoughtful and abstracted; which exciting the observation of his friends, some of them rallied him on it. He tried all he could to appear merry, but, in spite of every effort at cheerfulness, it was evident there was a cloud hanging over his

thoughts. Scarcly had the second course been served, when a retainer named Gobert, formerly a *valet de chambre* of the Count's, but afterwards promoted by his employer to a situation of confidence in Liége, entered, and whispered something in his ear. In a few moments afterwards, an adherent named Grandmont, followed by twenty foreign soldiers holding a naked sword in one hand and a carabine in the other, marched into the hall, and, having bowed to the company, ranged themselves—half on one side of the table and half on the other.

This troop drawn from the garrisons of Argenteau, Navagne, and Dalhem, having marched covertly by the route of St. Martin, descended to the banks of the Bégards, and finding a boat in readiness, entered it, and passing round the arm of the Meuse which flowed the whole extent of the ramparts, landed at the Isle of St. Jean, in the rear of the house where the banquet was being given, and so, by a preconcerted signal, gained admittance to the hall.

Almost stupified with astonishment, the guests remained for some time speechless; conceiving that it might be some design of the Count's to amuse them, till, La Ruelle the Burgomaster seeming to have some misgivings, demanded "to know the meaning of so warlike an attendance."

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing!" replied Warfusée, "but let no one attempt to move;" and turning to the soldiers, "Sirs," said he, "you will do injury to none here." As he spoke, however, as if to confirm the Burgomaster's presentiment of some impending danger, other Spanish soldiers were visible outside the hall—resting their arms against the iron bars of the windows. A moment or two of anxious silence succeeded, when Warfusée, pointing to Jaspar in waiting on the Burgomaster, cried—"Soldiers, seize that fellow?"

"Me?" exclaimed Jaspar, astounded, "of what am I accused, my Lord, to be thus treated?"

"I have said," replied Warfusée, "out with

him!" and, being seized and secured, Jaspar was dragged away.

"Now then!" cried the Count, "arrest the Burgomaster."

"What, me, too?" exclaimed La Ruelle, starting up and throwing down his napkin, say you so?"

"Yes, *you*," replied the Count, with a malicious smile of triumph, "and Monr. L'Abbé de Mouzon, and Monr. de Saizan, also."

Distressing was the scene that ensued, and violent the struggle between the soldiers and the Burgomaster; till, unable to offer further resistance, he was overpowered and borne away to his companion in an outer court. Agitated with the contending emotions that filled his breast, Warfusée now turned to his guests, and in a loud voice declared that he only acted by the orders of his imperial Majesty and his Royal Highness, who had resolved to tolerate no longer the intrigues carried on at Liége between the Burgomaster La Ruelle and the French party. "He knew very well," he said, "that he exposed him-

self, by acting as he had done, to the resentment of the French—who had carried off his son, and might sacrifice him to their resentment; but even this should not deter him from rendering so great a service to his sovereign the King of Spain—to the Emperor, and his Royal Highness." Calling Grandmont, Warfusée then repaired to the court where stood La Ruelle by the side of Jasper, and approaching the Burgomaster, "Traitor!" said he, "this day I shall have your heart in my hands."

"Wretch!" exclaimed La Ruelle, "in what have I ever offended you—was it for this that you invited me to partake of your hospitality—to insult me thus, who never wronged you in word or deed?"

"The cords—the cords!" cried the Count, impatiently; and taking some papers from his pocket, "behold the orders from his Imperial Majesty, the Prince Cardinal, and his Royal Highness."

"Impossible!" exclaimed La Ruelle, "I am innocent."

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"I entreat you," replied the Count, "add not prevarication to your sins, but seek God's mercy forthwith for your soul in prayer, for, assuredly, you will instantly die."

While he thus spoke, Jasper was being bound; but there not being quite cord enough to secure the Burgomaster, one of the soldiers offered his garter; and, after a few ineffectual struggles, La Ruelle was made incapable of further resistance, and carried to an adjoining chamber.

"Ah, Sir," said Jasper in a piteous tone, turning towards his master as they were bearing him away, "I always thought some such fate as this would one day overtake us."

"Hold" cried La Ruelle, as he was being dragged past the Count, and making a last desperate effort to excite the compassion of his enemy, "wherefore this outrage—will you not hear me—will you stain your hands in the blood of a guiltless man—will nothing but my life satisfy you? Oh! Monr. le Comte, as you would one day that mercy—" . . . .

"Nay," interrupted Warfusée, "it is not to me you must now appeal for mercy — my

intercession would avail you nought — the heart's blood of the Burgomaster can alone reconcile the citizens of Liége to their Prince —away—away!" and summoning Gobert; "haste," said he, "fetch two confessors to shrive the traitors; we would not that they perish unabsolved." Almost immediately Gobert returned with two Dominican friars. Taking them aside, "Fathers," said Warfusée, "I have sent for you to assist the Burgomaster La Ruelle in his dying moments: —nay, expostulation is useless; there is no time to waste—he dies ere another hour, by the commands of his Imperial Majesty."

"Pardon, my Lord," replied one of the fathers, "never will I lend the ministrations of my holy office in aid of so flagitious an execution—I would rather suffer death myself than do it."

"How!" urged the Count, much exasperated, "are you not come to save the Burgomaster's soul? By heaven! if you refuse to confess him, and he die unabsolved, you alone will be responsible."

"Alas!" appealed the good man, throwing

himself at the Count's feet, "is there no hope —no grace for the unfortunate? O, my Lord! reflect well, I implore you, on what you are about to do; rather would I perish than assist in so heinous a crime."

"Peace!" cried the Count, "I obey the commands of his Imperial Majesty," and turning to the soldiers, "kill him—kill him!" vehemently added he, "why waste we so much time?" whereupon, Grandmont, calling some of his men aside, gave them some directions in a low voice; and one of them going straightway to the Burgomaster, "Monr." said he compassionately, "think, I pray you, of your soul; you have not many more minutes to live."

"Ah, my God!" cried La Ruelle, wringing his hands, "is this the recompense I get for the many services I have rendered the Count de Warfusée? Friend, you might perhaps save me if you would:—Oh! think that some day you might be in my situation; are we not all men and brethren—can you have the heart to kill one in cold blood who has never done you harm?"

"Alas!" replied the Spaniard, with downcast eyes—we are soldiers, and must obey our rulers; but would to God! you were safe out of our hands."

In despair, La Ruelle then sent for one of the Confessors. "What, Father," cried he, as the holy man advanced towards him, "must I die—is there no hope? O, go yet once again I entreat you, and make one more effort, for the love of God! to soften the Count's heart."

"With tears rolling down his cheeks, the Friar hastened back to Warfusée; and again on his knees besought his pity and intercession—but he was inexorable; and returning to the unhappy Burgomaster, and assuring him, while grief almost choked his utterance, that he had tried every plea in vain to move the Count's compassion, urged him to employ the few remaining moments yet left him in the necessary preparation for eternity.

While La Ruelle was under confession, Jasper, by the mediation of Gobert, obtained permission to speak with the Count; and making grievous lamentations at the unde-

served hardship of his fate—he being in no-wise implicated in the charges made against his master—Warfusée, after some hesitation, replied, "that if he would go with him to his imperial Majesty, and make a declaration as he should instruct him, he need have nothing to fear; but first," continued he, "you must assist me, by explaining to the citizens who will presently surround my house, that La Ruelle was a traitor, and merited the fate he has met with."

During this parley with Jasper, the Count in a fever of nervous excitement continued going in and out of the court, and muttering incoherently, and stamping his feet like one beside himself; while ever and anon he called to Gobert or Grandmont, "Why waste we so much time? finish it—finish it—quick—quick!"

In vain did his daughters with tears and entreaties implore him to relinquish further participation in the dreadful deed he contemplated. Brutally repulsing them, the more they besought his mercy, the louder he persisted in

calling to the soldiers "finish it—finish it!" when the three men, to whom had been assigned the horrible task of assassinating the Burgomaster, stepped forward, and declared "they would rather be led out and shot than raise their weapons against a man who had never injured them."

Furious with rage, the Count called to Gobert, saying, "On you alone, Gobert, can I depend."

"*Pardon!* not on me, my Lord," replied Gobert, "by the blessed Virgin! I cannot—will not do it—*pardon*, my Lord, I am not an executioner."

"Ah, say you so?" muttered Warfusée, biting his lip; and going up to three other soldiers, he induced them by the promise of a large reward to follow him to the chamber in which the Burgomaster was confined; and throwing open the door, "Behold the Traitor!" said he, and hastened back to the court.

Rushing on their victim without a moment's delay, the wretched Burgomaster received four deep sabre cuts on the head and shoul-

ders from the Spaniards. "Mercy—mercy!" cried he—and his shrieks and groans were heard even in the banquet hall. But still continuing to struggle under the blows of his assassins, one of them ran into the court for Grandmont's sword; returning with which, they pierced him several times with it through the breast, when, having drawn his last breath, they rifled his pockets and returned exultingly to their comrades.

Hearing the unfortunate La Ruelle's cries, the other guests had made up their minds that their own last hour was at hand; and when the pious Father who had attended the Burgomaster in his last moments made his appearance, they all pressed forward to avail themselves of his ghostly consolations. The Abbé de Mouzon was the first to desire to make a declaration of his sins, but was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Warfusée, who, flushed and excited, exlaimed in a triumphant tone, "At last the Burgomaster is dead, duly confessed and repentant—having first asked pardon of God for his crimes, and

forgiveness of the Emperor and his Royal Highness"—saying which, he hurried from the hall; shortly after which, Grandmont entered, and summoning the Prebendary of Kerkhem and the Prebendary Nyes, Warfusée delivered to them some sealed letters addressed to the different chapters of the city; which having promised to present, they received permission to depart, of which, as may be supposed, they lost no time in availing themselves.

But a change of fortune was fast approaching the Count de Warfusée, who, blinded by ambition, had not sufficiently considered the consequences of the atrocious crime he was so eager to perpetrate. Although a resident of Liége for many years, he was totally ignorant of the people:—with reckless impetuosity, like a rash adventurer, he had rushed into the very jaws of destruction, without so much as reflecting if there was a possibility of escape.

Soon arose a rumour that something extraordinary was going on in the Count de Warfu-

sée's house. Soldiers from Navagne had been observed traversing the Meuse by St. Jean, who, it was said, were employed to carry off the Count and his guests; and, it presently becoming known that the Burgomaster La Ruelle had gone to dine that day with Warfusée, one of his relations with some of the Burghers ran to the house, when, being told that the clashing of swords and cries of distress had been heard, and that it was believed La Ruelle had been assassinated, they began knocking at the door and demanding if the Burgomaster was there?

After a short delay, Warfusée allowed the relative and two or three of the most intimate of La Ruelle's friends to enter. Expressing their surprise at seeing so many armed men in the court, the Count conducted them to the garden and thus addressed them:—

"Gentlemen, which desire you to be,—Frenchmen, Spaniards, or Hollanders?"

"Wherefore such a question, Monr. le Comte?" answered they, "We desire to be

neither; but to continue what we have ever been—true and independent Liégois."

"Good!" rejoined Warfusée, "then what would you say if you knew that La Ruelle had sold your country to the French—to be delivered into their hands in the month of August next?"

"It is false!" cried the citizens, "we will never believe it."

"Know you not his handwriting?" continued Warfusée, drawing some papers from his bosom.

"Mean you these?" exclaimed the citizens, examining them, —"they are counterfeits."

"Ah, say you so?" rejoined the Count, "but here are others — what say you to these?"

"Counterfeits all," replied the Burghers— "they are not the signatures of La Ruelle the Burgomaster."

"It matters not," answered the Count, "the commands of his Imperial Majesty and my Prince were to put the traitor to death;

he has died well confessed; and Monr. Mouzon, and Monr. de Saizan, his coadjutors, are under arrest here also."

"How—say you seriously that La Ruelle is dead?" demanded his friends, "what think you, Monr. le Comte, will come of this?"

"Will you see him?" demanded Warfusée.

"No, no—God forbid!" replied they,—"let us go hence, we entreat you!"

Meanwhile, the news of the Burgomaster's assassination having transpired and spread far and wide over the city, a vast crowd began to assemble round the Count's house.

"Hark!" exclaimed the kinsmen of the unfortunate Burgomaster who were in conference with the Count, "hark! *Monr.;* we beseech you suffer us to depart, or we shall all be lost—hear you not the uproar of the populace without?"

Warfusée listened for a moment, and turned deadly pale as the menaces and hootings of the infuriated mob caught his ear: "*Messrs.*" said he, with visible consternation, "conduct me, I pray you, to the Burgomasters—I will

appeal to the Burgomasters for protection: by your favour, *Messrs.* I throw myself on your assistance to save my life—hasten, I entreat you, to send me the necessary aid;" and opening the door with his own hand, he allowed them to depart.

Surrounded, in a moment, by the people demanding to know what was passing in the Count's dwelling, they could contain themselves no longer;—"To arms!" cried they, "the Burgomaster La Ruelle has been assassinated;—to arms—to arms!"

Warfusée hearing the howlings and imprecations of the momentarily increasing mob, ran trembling from head to foot in an agony of fear from place to place like a madman. Observing Jasper sitting meditatively under one of the galleries—waiting stoically the result of the turn which affairs had taken—"Go, friend!" said he, "ascend the terrace, and declare to the people that La Ruelle has suffered death because he was a traitor to his country."

Jasper mounted the terrace, opened wide

his mouth, and appeared to address the multitude, but, in truth, said nothing.

"Why speak you not to them?" demanded the Count.

"They are too far off," replied Jasper, "there is such a tumult they cannot hear me."

"Go up again," cried the Count.

Jasper obeyed—but no sooner had he reached the terrace a second time, than, precipitately descending,—"For the love of God!" said he, "retire, my Lord—haste—there is not a moment to lose, if you would save your life—behold the muskets pointed against your house."

During this anxious colloquy, the Baron de Saizan and his companions, hearing the vociferations of the people without, took courage, expecting every moment that some effectual attempt would be made for their deliverance; and the Spanish soldiers, reflecting on their own perilous position, turned their regards towards their prisoners, in the hope that, should the chances of war place

them at the mercy of their enemies, their intercession would save them from a fearful fate.

While some of the mob were endeavouring by heavy blows and threats to gain admittance by the street door, others, assailing the house in the rear by scaling the garden walls, overthrew every obstacle in their way, and rushing through the passages, at last gained the hall where the imprisoned guests were assembled.

"Save us — save us!" cried the Abbé de Mouzon and Monr. de Saizan, running with the ladies to the grated windows, "Messrs. fire not, for God's sake! we are the Count's prisoners confessed to die; Oh, save us — save us! and, turning to the soldiers, "lay down your arms," said the Baron de Saizan, "and you shall have quarter."

Seeing their assailants in such force, the Spaniards gave up their arms; but the incensed Liégois, bursting open the door, would hear nothing. Regardless of every thing but the gratification of their vengeance, in spite

of all entreaties they fell on them, and unmercifully massacred them to a man.

During the heat of the *mêlée*, amidst blows of halberds and hissing of balls, while several of the assailants in the confusion of the fray fell wounded beneath each other's weapons, the Baroness de Saizan and her daughter miraculously escaped from the house; while the daughters of the Count, almost dead with terror, were conducted by some of the citizens, who took pity on them, in safety to the Hôtel de Ville. But this was only the prelude to far more terrible scenes yet to follow.

Warfusée had disappeared, and the people now exasperated beyond control, like bloodhounds sought everywhere with relentless determination for their prey. Soon, the cousin of La Ruelle, of whom mention has been made before, followed by some staunch adherents well armed came to an upper chamber, where, surrounded by a guard of Spaniards, Warfusée slightly wounded in the forehead lay almost fainting on a bed. Having compelled the soldiers to lay down their

arms the Count—finding that resistance would be useless—raised himself up from his couch, and imploring grace, offered a thousand *patacons* if they would spare his life.

"Villain!" cried the cousin of La Ruelle, think you I will barter away the blood of my kinsman for gold? away with him!" and, dragging him from the top of the staircase to the bottom, they paused not till they had reached the street door, when, receiving a sword thrust in the side, he fell on his knees. Attempting to rise—a second thrust laid him on the earth, when, throwing themselves on his prostrate body, the mob—with furious cries, stripped him of his garments, and bearing him off to the market-place—there hung him head downwards on a gibbet. Mutilated in all his members, they inflicted every possible indignity on his mangled corpse; then, having burnt it, cast the ashes into the Meuse. The Spanish soldiers, to the number of sixty or seventy, were all cut to pieces, except two who effected their escape.

But the vengeance of the people was not

yet satiated. Blinded by the eager thirst for revenge on those whom they deemed in anywise obnoxious to them, they seemed determined to exterminate their oppressors without distinction. The Avocat Marchand and the Sheriff Théodore de Fléron—two of the most eminent lawyers of the day, and universally respected—were immolated with barbarous cruelty — one of the assassins of Fléron throwing himself on his corpse, and actually sucking his blood, and tearing his garments into tatters with his teeth. But, his innocence being afterwards proved, La Ruelle's son, who for some time had filled the office of sheriff of Liége, resigned it in favour of the celebrated Mathias de Louvrex, Fléron's grand nephew—as some recompense for the injuries done his uncle.

It appearing, furthermore, from some papers seized at the Count de Warfusée's, that the Carmelites were cognizant of the intended assassination of La Ruelle, the people repaired to their Convent, broke open the Church doors, and committed every kind of

profanation; the Monks escaping with difficulty, and taking refuge at Huy.

Having ransacked the Convent, they next visited the Jesuits—poignarded the Rector, pillaged and laid waste his house, desecrated the vestry, drove the brethren before them out of the place, wounding several who resisted. Then, having made ready the gibbets on the market-place, they dragged the *Chiroux* and other obnoxious persons, without the least formality, to execution; preceded by a band of furious fanatics, crying "*Mort aux Chiroux — mort aux Prêtes!*"

As if to prevent any subsidence of the popular frenzy, daily lists were published of the names of proscribed citizens, patricians, magistrates, and ecclesiastics, who, like the Spaniards, were suspected of conspiring against the state. The body of La Ruelle was exposed to public view for several days, and visited with every demonstration of mourning by thousands—who professed to regard him as a patriot and martyr to the good cause. His obsequies were solemnized

with unusual pomp, and a statue ordered to be erected to his memory by the side of Beeckman's, in one of the chief thoroughfares of Liége.

Events, however, soon followed which diverted public attention for a time from La Ruelle and his monument; till the revolution of '89 restored them once more to notice. By some historians of that epoch, the titles of "Good Citizen," "Renowned Tribune," "Intrepid Defender of the People's Liberties," are accorded him; but it is very doubtful, whether, except for his tragical end, he would ever have been a particular object of popular esteem. Certainly, there is no proof that La Ruelle was guilty of aiding the conspiracy of which he was accused by Warfusée — viz. "the betrayal of his country to the French." Such a supposition, to say the least, was most improbable; but all agree that he was the dupe of the Abbé de Mouzon and the Count de Warfusée. On terms of the greatest intimacy with these men, he had always extended to them his friendship

and protection; and it was doubtless this reflection that drew from him the exclamation to the Spaniard, "Ah, my God! is this the recompense I receive for the many services I have rendered the Count de Warfusée?" It is not a little surprising that the Abbé de Mouzon, so noted for disturbing the public tranquillity on several occasions, and the Count de Warfusée, who was known to have robbed and betrayed his Prince, should not, from the notorious suspicion attached to them, have put him more on his guard.

The faithful Jasper, who, on the day of the fatal banquet, cried, "Ah, Sir! I always thought some such fate as this would overtake us," seems, as De Gerlache says, to have had more discernment than his master.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG the many more important traditions of this land of adventure, in an historical point of view; some of which for deep and absorbing interest are not surpassed in any of Belgium's eventful records—none that I remember, of a domestic character, connected with recollections of the fair province of Liége, interested me more than the following little tale of The Prophetess of Embourg; for the particulars of which I am chiefly indebted to a worthy and veracious old Crone and her maiden daughter, at whose cottage oftentimes during my mountain rambles in the neighbourhood of Embourg I was wont to tarry, and over a cup of goat's milk and a

slice of *dorré* listen to many a heart-stirring tale of bygone times. Thus, during a pretty long sojourn among the mountains, and entirely of Lord Bacon's opinion, that "a light may be obtained from any man's candle," I lost no opportunity of picking up a scrap here and a scrap there, as occasion offered; so, from one source or another, a rare stock of legendary lore have I gathered together, and which I fully purpose, *nemine dissentiente*, shall form the burden, some day or other, of a neat Octavo, entitled, Tales of Eastern Belgium, than which no country affords a richer mine of yet unappropriated treasures for the story teller. Would that this humble pen had the power to do them justice. But this by the way.

Agnes Florenville was the only child of Monsieur and Madame Leduc Florenville, who, by the careful management of a productive farm at Embourg, together with the profits arising from the business of a *Marchand de bois*, carried on in conjunction with a large *Magazin de farine*, were among the wealthiest

proprietors of the neighbourhood, and their daughter was not only esteemed, by universal accord, the most beautiful, but would certainly be the richest heiress of her class within a circle of many miles. Far and wide were the charms of Agnes Florenville the theme of admiration or envy; and many a tender throb of hope did their contemplation awaken in the hearts of the fortunate youths who, from their position and circumstances, considered themselves privileged to aspire to so great a prize.

Nothing could be more unlike the generality of the fair maidens of Embourg than was Agnes; indeed, she seemed hardly to belong to the same rude mountain race by which she was surrounded. Her figure was perfection, so rarely met with in her countrywomen, with a grace and elegance of contour the more remarkable, as neither of her parents, although sufficiently well favoured, had any pretensions to superior personal attractions; and there was a refinement of manner in all she said or did, the more charming—as being

wholly unexampled in that uncultivated region. But, lovely as she was, Agnes Florenville was by no means a regular beauty; although as near an approach to the Grecian as you will see one female face in a thousand in these degenerate times. Her eyes were jet black, fringed with long silken lashes, and so lustrous that they seemed to pierce their object to the soul; to which, beautifully pencilled eyebrows—almost meeting, imparted additional loveliness. Her hair, worn in plain bands across a nearly perpendicular forehead, was dark as a raven's wing; her nose straight as an arrow, and such exquisite sweetness was there in her small mouth "not smiling," as the poets say, but ever "redolent of smiles," that if your heart were your own, and you wished to keep it so, it were as well if you did not gaze twice on that sweet mouth. Perhaps, the slight irregularity of some of her features served to enhance the general captivating expression of the *tout-ensemble*, and to give them more life and animation than is found in the perfect model. However this

may be—as every one granted she was perfection as she was, it matters little from what precise model nature had moulded her. There was that in Agnes which appealed to the heart as well as eye, and there can be no better test of true female captivation than this. Her's was not the mere classic beauty of a faultless statue, but of true flesh and blood—a form faithful to nature, and animated and actuated by as warm and generous a heart as ever beat in beauty's bosom; which is more than can be said of every piece of perfection. And she was as good as she was lovely—her beauty was not more the theme of universal admiration than her benevolence. Incalculable were the benefits her kindness and generosity, no less than her influence and example, conferred on the little community over which she seemed to preside as a tutelary genius. What the village of Embourg would have done without its Agnes Florenville it is impossible to say—she was the pride of every tongue, the idol seemingly of every heart. Did sickness or sorrow over-

take any of her poorer neighbours—did calamity befall, hunger press, or ruin threaten, who was ever first to whisper consolation and minister to their wants? Was there a village fête or revel—whose taste was first sought, or best displayed—whose skill, whose judgment, whose presence were indispensable to give the day *eclat?*—In a word, who reigned, and with good reason, supreme in Embourg, and what Queen was ever more beloved by her subjects than Agnes Florenville?

It often happens that with the utmost gentleness of heart and mildness of manner, are united indomitable courage and resolution. Amiability and firmness of purpose are by no means incompatible in the same person. The heart may be, at once, gentle as a lamb, and bold, if occasion require, as a lion; and this union of two of the finest attributes of our nature is, perhaps, the surest characteristic, of a noble disposition. Such was Agnes. Though meekness itself—though incapable of wronging by word or deed any living soul; though so sensitive that the mere sight of

misery would dim her eyes with tears; though so yielding, that she seemed hardly to have wish or will of her own, except it might be when engaged in ministering to others' wants, the casual observer would hardly have given her credit for the spirit of unflinching determination, the steady under-current of patient perseverance that flowed beneath the placid surface of her meek and gentle nature. To extreme delicacy of feeling were combined unshaken fortitude, and a total disregard for difficulty or danger in times of trial—which was the most admirable trait of her character, and procured her no less the confidence than the esteem of all who knew her. Perhaps it proceeded as much from the undeviating rectitude of her purpose, as from any peculiarity of moral organization. Certainly there is nothing conduces so much to inspire that spirit of fearlessness — that calm collected presence of mind in seasons of necessity, as perfect purity of purpose. Indeed, upon this grand feature in man's moral nature depend the chief attributes for good or

evil that mark and influence his character and actions throughout life;—without it the utmost stretch of mere physical daring is but bastard courage after all.

With so many charms of mind as well as person, no wonder if Agnes had many admirers. Among the foremost of those who were most assiduous in their attentions to the lovely maid of Embourg, and anxious to win her good opinion, were Ernest Rathère, and Denis Martel. No two young men could be more unlike each other in every respect. Ernest was almost a giant in stature, and of Herculean strength. His features, though far from regular, were striking, and would have been handsome, but for a certain grossness of the eye and mouth that gave them that peculiar expression which long nourished habits of self indulgence are sure to impart. His complexion, dark and swarthy as a gipsy's, was in keeping with his piercing hazel eyes, oval olive cheek, and black curly hair and moustache; which latter—together with a superabundant crop of whiskers extending al-

most to the point of the chin—he cultivated with peculiar care. His head was, even for his extraordinary height, too large; and surmounting a neck of bull like thickness, and too short—gave him the appearance of being slightly hump-backed when he walked; otherwise, his general deportment was not unprepossessing, and, when in good humour, his manners, in spite of the bluff egotistical swagger that characterized all he said and did, could be polished, and even courteous. The only son of a wealthy *Négociant* of the second class, Ernest had been brought up to succeed his father in the counting house; but it is very difficult to persuade a youth of Master Rathère's turn of mind of the necessity of sticking to business with a ready made fortune in store for him. As he grew up, it was soon evident to every one that if old Rathère had the happy art of making money—his hopeful son and heir was no less possessed of the necessary qualifications for spending it. Giving early and abundant promise of that apt spirit so cherished by doting relatives—those

dubious attributes for worldly distinction so much coveted by the would be great—there was little danger of the young merchant treading in the miserly steps of his parents. No Belgian mother ever more blindly loved her offspring than did Madame Rathère her brave curly headed boy—nor was he, seemingly, less the pet of his mother than of her confessor; so, no wonder if the old man was blind also, and deaf to his darling's failings. If he ever saw them at all, probably, he solaced himself with the hope that with age he would grow wiser; or, may be, had a secret pride in seeing Ernest outshine some of his more elevated associates. Certain it is, no youngster of the day was better supplied with the means to cut a dashing figure; so that, what with the countenance of Monr. le Curé—whose paternal regard for the welfare and happiness of his youthful charge silenced all scruples and atoned for every fault—unlimited resources, the most lavish tastes, a temper that brooked no restraint, and a total disregard for every consideration but his own gratifica-

tion—when Ernest arrived at man's estate, he was about as fair a specimen of ignorance, arrogance, and recklessness, as was to be met with in the fair province of Liége. Whatever he set his heart on—have he would, however great the penalty might be;—no sense of shame or disgrace, of justice or of honor ever seemed to check his headstrong career: capricious in his tastes, as he was regardless of the means by which they were indulged, novelty seemed the only shrine at which he worshipped—self the sole idol of his devotions; and no pretext too specious, no deed too dark or daring but Ernest Rathère could be capable of, in the prosecution of his own interests and intrigues.

Of all the hideous vices that disfigure and cling like a foul leprosy to man's nature—that peep forth at every turn, give deformity to all his thoughts and actions, embitter his own cup of pleasure, and poison the fountain of every mutual enjoyment, assuredly, selfishness is the most deplorable. Nature would seem to have set her face against it in all her works—nothing, as Providence designed it,

exists for itself alone—there is an obvious system of mutuality and reciprocity of obligation in all its provisions—a harmony of interests, a community of possession, a fraternity of progress, as it were, in all its movements, altogether at variance with man's selfishness—all its behests, all its bounties are inclusive; there is no partiality even, far less any exemption. Man's hateful passions—plague spots of his own creation alone—stand forth as sad exceptions to this blessed and universal law; and how great and grievous the penalty they are ever doomed to pay: as virtue must inevitably be its own reward, so will selfishness as certainly end in its own utter condemnation—give it but full license, let it have rope enough, and unrestricted swing, and it will as surely fall the victim of its own fatal fiat, as the judgments of good and evil are immutable and just.

Now, Denis Martel was in every way the very reverse of Ernest Rathère. Rather under than above the middle stature, by the side of his gigantic rival his slender but well-knit

figure was seen to great advantage by those who prefer symmetry and grace to mere physical developement. Although greatly inferior to Ernest in personal strength, he was immeasurably his superior in that true courage, that moral firmness, that noble generosity of sentiment and open manly expression of countenance which denote a really estimable nature. His features, though less striking at first sight, were more regular and pleasing than Rathère's; his hair of dark chesnut, flowing in natural curls over his high intelligent forehead, admirably harmonized with his large soft blue eyes and glowing cheeks; and there was a benevolent sweetness in the curl of his mouth when he smiled, and disclosed a set of beautifully white and even teeth, that was worth all the moustaches, however killing, that ever were cultivated. If the opinions of the prettiest maidens of Ninanne (the village where Denis resided with his parents, who owned a snug thriving little farm within half a league of Embourg) could be relied on, he was without a rival

either for personal charms or goodness of heart.

Denis alone seemed to have his misgivings: many an anxious reflection on his own inferiority would often overcloud his heart when he compared himself with his rich rival, and thought how superior he was in all worldly advantages to himself, whose only prospect was a life of unceasing labour and frugality: for, although old Martel was reputed rich by his neighbours—his savings, wrung from a long life of carefulness, had to be divided among three children, and considerable though they might be for one in his station, still, what was all weighed against the golden heaps of the wealthy old miser of *Les Battes?*

True, Denis need not go begging, and might command the hand of the fairest damsels of Ninanne or Beaufays; but, as fate would have it, he had been smiled on with more than usual sweetness by the lovely maid of Embourg, and from that moment every other divinity in the form of woman was deserted, to worship at the shrine of her who was des-

tined to be the sole idol of his affections. But what said Agnes herself—for which of her lovers did her own heart in reality acknowledge the preference?—for the rich, gay, dashing Ernest Rathère, or the humble, honest young farmer of Ninanne? We shall see.

CHAPTER III.

CHIEF among the numerous oracles that everywhere seem to have the privileged right as well as power to preside over the mysteries of the future—to forecast events, and solve the secrets of destiny, there is generally in most villages some old Crone, living in solitary communion with her own thoughts and half starved cat, allowed to be more gifted in fathoming the decrees of fate than all the rest of the community over which she holds undisputed sway put together. Where her knowledge has been acquired it is impossible to say; but that she has the highest testimonials of skill and profound learning in every branch of the occult sciences no one denies. The

accuracy of her discernment, the extent of her information, or the infallibility of her predictions it would be as presumptuous to question, as to doubt the miraculous virtues of her cards or coffee cup. Their prophetic powers have been too often proved to admit of dispute. She is at once the oracle, the referee, the arbitrator and confidant in all matters (and grave matters to those concerned they are) of love, ambition, hope, disappointment, joy and sorrow, jealousy and revenge. Her title to universal homage is established—her judgments are irrevocable, and her fiats final.

On the ground floor of a squalid-looking tenement, at the extremity of a dirty gloomy passage leading out of what may be called the main street of Embourg, lived, at the time we are considering, one of those old Crones or village Prophetesses, Jacqueline Dodon by name, as pure a specimen of what is generally understood by the significant appellation of an "Old Hag" as eyes ever beheld. Now, it is customary to associate with this

opprobrious title of "Old Hag," all that is most ill-favoured and repulsive, or the reverse of what the fancy most loves to contemplate in woman. With it arise the decrepit form, the sallow sunken cheek, the hollow eye, the toothless jaws, pinched nose and pointed chin; the palsied hand, the tottering step, the envious glance and malignant chuckle; in short all that is most frightful and repugnant:—but of all the horrible old hags that ever were a scandal to their sex and nature, none, perhaps, exceeded in ugliness and deformity The Prophetess of Embourg. Her age could not have been far short of eighty: her fleshless figure, bent almost double, described nearly a right angle as she crawled before you, leaning for support on a stout cane—shod at one end with a long pointed brass ferrule, and mounted with a carved horn handle in the form of an alligator—at the other. What little hair she had was snow white, and, strained back under a rusty black net half cap or handkerchief tied under the chin, increased, if possible, the pallor of her

bloodless visage. Her long beaked nose all but touched her chin; between which quivered and muttered incessantly her parched and livid lips. What the colour of her eyes might be, it was impossible even to form a guess, so sunk were they in their sockets, and overshadowed by long shaggy eyebrows; but there was an expression in their lustreless gaze when fixed on you, indescribable—you shrunk from it as you would from something loathsome; as you did, likewise, from the touch of her withered icy fingers when extended towards you. The only faculty that seemed to defy the ravages of time was her voice—a mixture of the most discordant, jarring, horrible sounds imaginable. Still more revolting was her laugh:—that laugh once heard was not easily forgotten; and Jacqueline prided herself on it:—she saw the effect it produced:—the maintenance of her sway over the minds of her disciples depended as much on the awe as the confidence with which she inspired them:—her hideous laugh had more terror in it than the malediction of the

Priest himself;—none ever prospered who had called down on themselves Jacqueline's laugh.

It was seldom that she was seen outside her door, except now and then in fine weather, when, staff in hand, and her cat—the only favourite she seemed to have in the world—at her heels, she might occasionally be observed hobbling round a little plot of fenced ground behind her cottage, in which she reared a few vegetables, screaming at the village urchins who stole her apples, or venting her wrath on the slugs and snails that fed upon her cabbages. Except on these occasions, she confined herself to her stronghold—a small dingy comfortless apartment—the *sanctum* in which she passed her days from year's end to year's end, received her visitors, and exercised all the mysteries of her prophetic calling.

And a curiosity in its way was the little parlour of The Prophetess of Embourg. Lighted by a single window, just enough of the sun's rays penetrated to disclose the squalid wretchedness of all around. In one

corner stood a worm-eaten, clumsy chest of drawers of great antiquity, over which was suspended a small ivory figure of the Saviour on an ebony cross, with the skull and crossed bones; opposite which was a ricketty cupboard or cheffonier, wherein was stowed away such an indescribable medley of the ornamental and useful—such an heterogeneous accumulation of the proceeds of more than fifty years' gleanings, of rarities and rubbish—filth and finery, natural and artificial, as baffles all enumeration. On either side of the hearth was a recess; before one of which, that communicated with an inner chamber, was always drawn a black stuff curtain curiously wrought down the middle with divers fantastical devices of mixed silk and worsted, but the precise characters of which, from long wear and tear, it was impossible accurately to decipher. In the other figured the only piece of furniture of any value in the room—an antique escritoir of cherry wood handsomely inlaid with brass and of superior workmanship; and which, from its freedom from the

dirt and dust that plentifully reposed on every thing else, was evidently an object of its mistress's peculiar care. On the marble slab of this escritoir was ranged a collection of curiosities, which, like the contents of the cheffonier, defy description — crucifixes of every conceivable fashion and material; colossal and dwarf images of the blessed Virgin and the infant Jesus in wood and wax work; rosaries of all colours and sizes—chaplets, amulets, bleeding hearts, *fac-similes* of the saints in every stage of martyrdom; flying doves, crawling serpents—lambs, scorpions, skeletons, angels and devils—all mingled in such confusion, that any attempt at classification, much less to assign them that due share of attention to which they were severally and collectively entitled, as well in an historical as an antiquarian point of view, would be impracticable.

But, perhaps, the greatest curiosity of all was a curious coloured engraving framed and glazed, and occupying a prominent place over this cabinet of wonders, of the infant Christ

sitting in Mary's lap, being dressed; while an attendant angel in the background, peering joyously over the Virgin's shoulder, is playing the fiddle to amuse him. A bunch of dried *Immortelles*, stuck over this glorious conception, proved in what estimation it was held by its possessor; as were also two elaborately finished lithographs—one representing Napoleon at the battle of Austerlitz, the other an edifying illustration of "souls in purgatory"—in various states of probation and purification. An oblong oak table covered with a black cloth, round which was worked a deep border of cabalistic characters in party coloured worsteds, like the curtain—an antique high back carved arm chair stuffed and covered with what had once been a rich crimson velvet, invariably occupied by the Prophetess at her audiences, and two or three smaller ones of the same fashion; not to omit mention of an enormous grim cat—her inseparable companion—completed the appointments of this apartment. And verily may it be asserted that no chamber in the fair province of Liége

was ever the scene of deeper counsels, the repository of more important secrets and confessions, the witness of blinder faith, or the source of more momentous issues than was the little parlour of the Prophetess of Embourg. Far and wide was the name of Jacqueline Dodon held in awe and amazement: sought for her miraculous soothsaying powers by all classes and creeds—by rich as well as poor; by the great and learned, as well as the humble and ignorant, there were no bounds to her influence; and immense, it was said, were the sums, in spite of her simulated poverty, she had amassed by her prophetic skill and the credulity of her votaries.

She might be said to live in solitude, for, her only attendant being a poor, half-witted girl of sixteen—Pauline by name, who, for her food and a wretched crib in the *grenier*, did the drudgery of the house—and whose whole powers of speech being confined to a few almost incoherent sentences, had no further companionship with her mistress than in ministering to her commands, or bearing the blows

and menaces continually heaped on her, she seemed, except in her intercourse with the world for her own profits, to have no feeling in common with any living creature, unless it might be her cat, which, being a pretty faithful type in disposition of herself, seemed to have monopolized all her sympathies.

Poor Pauline's sad history is told in a few words. She was the daughter of one of the miners who gained a precarious existence by working at the stone quarries beyond the Montagne de Flandre, on the road to Ninanne. When scarcely eight years old, she was returning one evening through the woods from Ninanne, where she had been on an errand, when she was witness, unhappily, to a dreadful murder and robbery, committed by an *Ouvrier* on a gentleman who was retracing his steps, after a ramble over the mountains, to Chaudfontaine. Terrified, she crept behind a bush; but the miscreant had observed her, and, dragging her from her concealment, dealt her a heavy blow on the head which laid her motionless at his feet, and, believing

that he had silenced her for ever, hurled her over the precipice and there left her for dead. But the vital spark was not extinct when, search being made, she was found at the cliff's foot, and carried all but lifeless to her father's cottage. Many months did the little sufferer keep her bed, when she was taken from it a cripple and an idiot. For some time it was thought that Pauline, in search for nuts and berries on the cliff's verge, had over-reached herself, lost her footing, and fallen over it; and this supposition gained general credence, as she was often in the habit of clambering up the mountain in company with other children after the wild fruits that grew in abundance thereabouts; but the body of the murdered man being at length discovered buried under some rubbish in the wood, and some vague remarks, with the partially returning light of reason, falling from the poor child, suspicion rested on Piérre Grimoald—a miner of abandoned character, who, it was remembered, from a state of abject poverty, had suddenly been pos-

sessed of considerable sums of money:—inquiries were made, and a purse and silver watch—identified as having belonged to his victim—were found concealed in his cottage. He was arrested, condemned, and suffered the penalty of his crime; having made a full confession the night before his execution.

As years passed and Pauline grew up, the injury of the hip, which had been one of the consequences of her terrible fall, was so far restored as to enable her to throw aside her crutch, leaving only a slight limp when she walked: every thing, too, that skill and kindness could do to encourage the partial restoration to reason, of which her mind gave occasional indications, was tried; but all endeavours to fix her attention to any settled pursuit were in vain; the mind's blessed light was for ever eclipsed—and though casual glimmerings above the dark clouds that overshadowed it would sometimes break forth and give promise of brighter hopes, fitful and short lived were these precious gleams—the cord had been strained too tight—the balance

lost beyond the power of human art to recover: still were some sparks left; and there were times when, under the influence of strong emotions, she evinced such consciousness, and exhibited so many proofs of attachment and gratitude towards those who were kind to her, that it was evident the power of discerning good from evil had not deserted her. Thus, many were the useful and kindly offices in which she was engaged, as she increased in strength, for her poor parents and neighbours, till, attracting the notice of Madame Dodon—whose increasing infirmities called for constant assistance in her household duties—Pauline's friends were glad to accept the Prophetess' offer to take her under her protection.

The truth is, Pauline was exactly the sort of person Jacqueline most desired to have about her. She could be useful in a variety of ways, would be wholly under her control, and, having no tongue, could tell no tales; so, she was admitted into her service as a sort of dumb waiter—a patient, impassive,

obedient slave to do the unquestioned bidding of her superior, and bear without remark or murmur every burthen or indignity heaped upon her. Unhappy child! wretched indeed would have been her lot, but for the encouragement and consolation her wounded spirit received under the watchful care of that kind guardian angel, whose heart, including in its tender solicitude every object of pity within its reach, had especial compassion and regard for the poor helpless idiot; and never was guardian spirit worshipped with more devoted adoration than was Agnes by her protegée Pauline. She would have followed her as a faithful slave to the world's end, or gladly laid down her life for her—for who was so kind and gentle and patient towards her as Agnes? Yes—and it was only the dread of a separation from her beloved patroness, by the return to her parents who had left Embourg, if she quitted the Prophetess' roof, that stifled her complaints, and enabled her to bear with submission the tyrannical temper and cruel treatment of her pitiless task-

mistress. Often driven to fury by her ill-usage, all reason seemed to have left her, and terrible would have been the vengeance wreaked on her oppressor in these maddening moments of despair, but for the recollection of her guardian Agnes. It was that sweet name—that angelic form ever present to her thoughts, always seeming to be hovering round her, that preserved from total extinction the few sparks of reason yet remaining; that restrained, encouraged, and supported her under every trial, and armed her against the hardships and humiliations of her hapless lot.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was the 15th August—the *Fête* of Notre Dame—an universal holiday; and no day ever dawned, say they, more like what a day ought to be for a holiday than this. Had it been made on purpose it could not possibly have been more propitious to the wishes of the thousands assembled from all parts to do homage to the Virgin, and to celebrate the festivities permitted to her faithful servants. Now, as it happens nineteen times out of twenty that *fêtes* and festivities are either ushered in or overtaken by threatening clouds or drenching showers, so decided an exception to the rule general ought to be recorded. It was, in truth, one of those rare epochs—

those heavenly dispensations, when the hearts of all living creatures seem as unclouded as the skies: one glorious blaze of sunshine from sunrise to sunset, in the which all nature basked in the perfection of existence; when smiles were on every face, and not a heart but swelled with joy and thankfulness; in which youth knew no bounds to its gladness, and old age felt at least twenty years younger; in plain phrase, it was just one of those delectable days—and this describes it exactly—which not once in a thousand times falls to the good fortune of a pleasure trip or a pic-nic party.

The morning, so redolent of smiles and full of promise, had been ushered in, as usual, by the roar of cannon, and the ringing of bells; heard ever and anon between which were the hymns chanted by the villagers as they strolled along in happy little knots dressed in their holiday suits, one and all determined, seemingly, to dedicate themselves heart and soul to the festive enjoyments of the day.

At every appointed place by which the

procession which always accompanies these annual *fêtes de la Viérge* was to stop, the village maidens, decked out in all the colours of the rainbow, were busily engaged decorating the *Réposoirs,* or altars; at each of which the officiating Priest, carrying the *St. Sacrement,* was to rest, offer a short prayer, and bless the people. And great were the pains taken to make these pretty *Réposoirs* worthy the occasion. In poured the materials for their construction from all quarters,—the wealthier classes vieing with each other which should display the warmest zeal. From some came valuable carpets and draperies; from others linens and laces, rich muslins and tapestries; while others contributed vases of the finest porcelain filled with choicest flowers; or candelabras, or mirrors, or costly pictures and *epergnes* and *girandoles*;—in fact every thing that could be thought of to give effect to the *coup d'œil;* while the young men were no less actively occupied in ranging fresh-cut trees and shrubs and evergreens along the road side, and setting off the windows and porches

of their houses with innumerable candles and crucifixes to the best advantage.

As twelve struck, the thunder of the cannon announced that the procession had arrived at the first *Réposoir;* and then commenced a scene which, viewed in the crowded thoroughfares of a great city, is grand and full of interest, but amidst the peaceful scenery of a mountain country, imposing in the extreme.

First in order marched a *Garde Champétre,* a functionary of no little importance—as the pompous air which he threw about him on every side sufficiently attested—bearing the Cross, followed by a full band of music and two hundred *Chanteurs,* dressed in their Sunday suits, singing anthems; and succeeded by the *Portes Drapeaux,* or flag-bearers; after which the village *Curé* with other Priests from the adjoining parishes. Then came the Virgin on her throne, in her gorgeous crown and ermined robes of satin and silver, borne by four *porteurs,* and attended by her *petits Anges* in snow-white frocks and chaplets—emblems

of innocence and purity—and *Cornettes* in their black beaver cocked hats, white plumes and crimson *saches;* and, last of all, the Tabernacle, supported by four pall bearers; beneath which with slow and measured step walked the Priest in dazzling vesture of gold and satins, preceded by young damsels strewing flowers in his path, and followed by the people. It was a soul-stirring scene. As the stranger joined the long *cortége,* as it wound its way through the valley up the mountain side with its fine band of sacred music, and listened to the sweet toned voices of the youthful *Chanteurs* filling the air with their solemn harmony, he could hardly wonder at the devotions manifested for a religion so impressive and inspiring in all its rites and pageantries, so apparently indulgent in all its behests, and that appealed so forcibly to the fondest weaknesses of its votaries. Whatever his creed might be, if his mind were rightly attuned, he could not be a witness of such a scene with feelings otherwise than of respect; even though the short space sup-

posed to exist between the sublime and the ridiculous might appear to his cooler judgment to be over-stepped by such apparent incongruities as the occasional skirmishes between the *Gardes Champêtres* with drawn swords and the people, or the halting of the blessed Virgin at intervals at some low *Auberge*, while her supporters wiped the perspiration from their brows, and were served all round, on the sly, with a *petite goutte*.

The good Priest, engaged in his holy duties at the next *Réposoir*, knew nothing of these profanations;—he was not responsible for the transgressions of his flock. In the very best of human institutions it is ever thus—there is much may be corrected and amended; but, in spite of all deficiences or excesses on the part of her faithful worshippers, the Virgin is no less the blessed St. Vièrge—the indispensable mediator, the soul and essence, under the dispensation of her zealous priesthood, of catholic faith and salvation; nor is her title to supremacy to be shaken or invalidated by their irregularities.

At all events, they are not intended for the observation merely of inquisitive eyes, which might be better employed in improving the imperfections of their own vision. If any such are ever among her followers, she expects, no doubt, that they will endeavour to discern in her holy ceremonials that which is typical of good. On this she lays great stress—remembering that there are many roads to truth, that profitableness of result is the utmost fallible man can aspire to, and always rather to be recognized than any particular mode of giving it expression.

But the procession had passed the last *Réposoir*—the echo of the cannon's roar had died away among the hills—the religious rites had all been duly solemnized, and nothing remained but for pleasure and rejoicing to commence their reign.

As usual, the chief attractions everywhere were the *bals champêtres* which were to crown the festivities of the day; and no where were preparations for a brilliant display going on more industriously than in the romantic vil-

lage of Embourg. In a beautifully planted orchard of considerable extent, adjoining Monr. Florenville's premises, which commanded a charming view of the Ourthe and the chain of mountains beyond it—clad in the most luxurious foliage, and stretching away, as far as the eye could reach towards Tilff, the hammers of the *Ouvriers* might be heard from day break, fixing seats, and arranging tasteful draperies of white and scarlet, interspersed with profusions of flowers and evergreens, and tiny tricoloured flags, and gaudy transparencies, under the special direction and superintendence of the famous Monr. Mathieu Vanriques, whose artistic skill on these festive occasions had long carried off the palm from all competitors, and justly raised him to an enviable position among the greatest scenic artists of the day.

At one end of the orchard selected for the field, that day, of his triumphs, was erected a circular covered platform fitted up with the necessary apparatus for the musicians, whose enlivening performances were to keep all

feet going, and all hearts in harmony that night.

Suspended in front of this, was a large brass chandelier of rude workmanship holding sconces for twelve wax candles, and at each corner of the ground was placed a high pole, at the top of which was to blaze a pitch torch, constructed to burn for several hours, and to shed, if not the steadiest, at all events a very strong light around; and the moon, being near the full, would lend its aid to throw additional lustre over all; so that when evening at last arrived, and the numberless little coloured oil lamps that hung, as if by magic, in rich and graceful festoons from tree to tree, were all lighted, and the transparencies—productions of Mathieu Vanriques' own inimitable genius, arranged to his satisfaction, the effect was enchanting. Nothing was wanting but the appearance of Agnes Florenville —the Queen of the ball—to give the signal for the commencement of the night's festivities in good earnest; and soon—dressed to perfection in a silver-grey cloth spencer of

the finest texture and richly brocaded—a white quilted full petticoat, which barely reaching to the instep, displayed a faultless foot and ankle, and a cherry-coloured silk hooded mantle, thrown carelessly over the shoulders, and intended to be put on and off at pleasure—the beautiful Maid of Embourg, looking if possible more lovely than ever, and illuminating everything on which she smiled, entered the orchard leaning on the arm of Monr. Florenville.

And now the light-hearted votaries of Terpsichore had nothing left to wish for—merrily went the music, dance followed dance in rapid succession—the ball was at its height, when a tall, robust, dashing young Chevalier dressed in the extremity of the mode, and sparkling with *bijouterie*, made his appearance, evidently on the best possible terms with himself; although, from the somewhat haughty, patronizing air he threw around him, it was clear that he considered his presence amidst that rustic assembly as no slight concession of pride on his part, and for which

he expected to be indemnified by universal homage and adulation.

"*Mon Dieu!* who is that dark, handsome Chevalier, *mon cher* Emille, with those piercing eyes, that just passed us?" exclaimed a very pretty, laughing, blue-eyed girl of Beaufays to her partner—a smart, good-looking, curly-headed young notary of Chenée, on whose arm she was leaning.

"Oh, don't you know him?" replied Emille, "young Rathère, the rich old merchant's son of Les Battes."

"What, Monr. Ernest Rathère, who, they say, is looking so sweet on Agnes Florenville?"

"Yes — he will have at least half a million, they say, at the old miser's death, and is looking out for a wife."

"*Vraiment!*" smiled Adolphine, passing the palm of one hand across her forehead, and arranging a stray curl, "he might come to a worse market for beauty than Embourg—eh, Monr. Emille?"

"Indeed might he, Mademoiselle Adol-

phine," assented Emille, "and so seems to think himself—to judge by his approving glance at you just now."

"At me? *mon Dieu!* now, how ridiculous! —there then, as I live, he's making his way as fast as he can to Mademoiselle Florenville —*malheureusement!* see, he is saluting Agnes —*ma foi!* how she coloured up—half a million—how happy Mademoiselle Florenville looks;—do *you* think Agnes, now, so very—very beautiful?"

"*En verité,*" replied Emille, "the most charming creature, but one, I ever saw in my life."

"And that one you think I am simpleton enough to believe is Adolphine Vivroux?"

"Who else should it be?" sighed Emille.

"Who else? let me see—Louise Bouvigne, or pretty Ninon, or that little coquette Rosalie Le Jeune, or a dozen other fair favourites of Monr. Emille's, to be sure.'

"*Ah, mon Dieu!* Mademoiselle is pleased to be facetious."

"Mademoiselle would be much better

pleased if Monr. Emille would not tear her *bouquet* to pieces in that cruel manner."

"There is nothing Emille would not do to please Mademoiselle Adolphine."

"And is it a proof of his devotion to pull that beautiful geranium to pieces?"

"*Pardon* — if Mademoiselle Adolphine would only put his devotion to the test."

"What, by throwing herself into the Ourthe for jealousy of Rosalie Le Jeune, that Monr. Emille may have the felicity of rescuing her from a watery grave, and an everlasting claim on her gratitude? certainly not.—Did Monr. Emille really and sincerely desire to establish his claim to her good opinion? —"

"Nothing would rejoice him so much," protested Emille, "he would esteem it his highest privilege to shed the last drop of his blood in her defence."

"*Bon!* then he might go and fetch her a glass of lemonade, and be quick about it, or they should be too late for the next dance."

Emille rushed to do her bidding.

"There," continued Adolphine, laughing

as she returned the empty glass, "that's better than trusting to your aquatic prowess, *mon chèr;* but look—how attentive Monr. Rathère is to Agnes—any one would think there was but one pretty woman in Embourg."

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed Emille, "but Denis Martel must look sharp with such a rival as Ernest Rathère."

"Poor Denis," said Adolphine, "and he's over head and ears in love too. *Ah, mon Dieu!* see how she smiles on the young Crœsus. If I were Denis I'd use my eyes, too, to-night, as well as other people."

"But they say," said Emille, "that she smiles more sweetly on Denis than on all the rest of her lovers put together; and yet never were sweeter looks than she is now bestowing on his rival:—heaven help us! you women are such riddles."

"And you men such simpletons to give us up so easily:—*taisez, taisez,* hark!—a valtz; see—see! she takes his arm,—half a million, *mon Dieu!* and what a figure! Madame may well be proud of such a son-in law: there

they go:—have the goodness, *mon chèr*, to hold my glove;—that will do; *merci*:—these scarfs are so tiresome! Do *you* think a cherry-coloured hooded mantle becoming, Monr. Emille?—A little more on this side, if you please,—there, that will do:—now I'm perfection—so come along, we will get into the next set and watch them."

Watched, indeed, that night by many more eyes than the little Notary of Chenée and Adolphine's, were the rich young merchant and his lovely partner; and, long before the last round, those best skilled in interpreting the language of looks had settled it beyond a doubt that, if ever there was a decided conquest, it was Agnes Florenville's over the heart of Monr. Ernest Rathère.

But not so certain seemed the triumph of the young Chevalier. Those who had observed them most closely during the dance could not but be aware that there was an unusual reserve in Agnes' manner towards her partner, and that she appeared to listen with evident impatience to his conversation, addressed frequently with a freedom and *em-*

pressement by no means agreeable to her. But this might be attributable to the consciousness of being the centre of attraction, the observed of all observers, rather than to any real feeling of dissatisfaction or indifference. Others thought that Denis Martel had nothing to fear—that, although her hand was given with such apparent cordiality to another, her heart and thoughts were elsewhere; and that if it were fated there should be an union between Ernest Rathère and the Maid of Embourg, to gratify ambition, mammon, not love, would be the presiding genius of their nuptials; while a few, acquainted with the character of the young squire, and better versed in the knowledge of the human heart, maintained that love had but little to do with his attentions to his lovely partner,—that, struck with her charms and excited by the desire to carry off the prize from so many competitors, all he aimed at was the gratification of his own wishes, and, these accomplished, he cared little who possessed, or what became of her.

But, whatever others said or thought, for Er-

nest Rathère it was a proud triumphant moment. Confident in his own personal attractions and superiority in point of worldly advantages to all around him; unused, moreover, to the slightest opposition to the gratification of his desires, such an idea as a repulse from a simple country girl on whom he had condescended to bestow his smiles never entered his imagination; and when, at the conclusion of the dance, he led Agnes through the admiring ranks that made way for him, and saw the envious glances from many a rival eye fixed on them, his exultation could hardly be suppressed.

CHAPTER V.

IMMEDIATELY adjoining the orchard, with which it communicated by a simple wicket, was a charming meadow planted with choice fruit trees, and bordered on either side by a double row of poplars and acacias, forming a delightful avenue for recreation during the heat of a summer's day. Along the whole extent of this walk had been placed, by Monr. Florenville's orders, seats at convenient distances, and appropriate emblematical devices in many coloured little oil lamps hung from tree to tree, for the gratification of those who during the evening might feel disposed, apart from the festive throng, to enjoy themselves under their soft refreshing shadows.

To one of these delicious seats Rathère led Agnes, his heart overflowing with self-congratulation.

"*Ah, mon Dieu! c'est paradis,*" exclaimed Rathère, taking off his hat to enjoy in perfection the refreshing coolness of the air, and running his fingers through his curls — "*Les Champs Elysées,* Mademoiselle; — *charmant, charmant! n'est ce pas?*"

"*Je crois bien,*" replied Agnes—"and I assure you Monr. Vanriques is not a little proud of his skill to-night, though it would be as well if he diversified his subjects a little more."

"By Juno! but he's an admirer, seemingly, of your sex, Mademoiselle," said Rathére, "for I'll be shot if his pretty *tableaux* are not all women—and devilish fine women, too!"

"And taken from the life," added Agnes, laughing; "the fact is, the Graces were losing their charms, and justly proud of his nine blooming daughters, poor man! one a *prima donna,* another a tragic star, another a poet

and *improvisatoire*, and so on, he thought he would give us the Mesdemoiselles Vanriques as the Muses—so, no wonder there's such a strong family likeness."

"*Magnifique!* exclaimed Rathère, examining the transparencies, which were really exceedingly well done, through a quizzing glass on the top of his cane; and then, gazing fondly into the beautiful face of his companion, "that charming brunette with the sloe-black eyes and ruddy lips—*qu'elle est divine!*"

"*Le pensez-vous?*" said Agnes, "I think I give the preference to the *blonde* with the rosy cheeks and blue riband in her hair;—it would puzzle a conjuror, though," continued she, wishing to give a turn to the conversation, "to tell which is Thalia and which Melpomene; can you enlighten my stupidity, Monr. Rathére?"

"I——? *mon Dieu!* I really have not the felicity of a personal knowledge of the Mesdemoiselles Vanriques."

At this moment Denis Martel, with Made-

moiselle Vivroux on his arm, entered the "Champs Elysées" much to Agnes' relief.

"*Par Dieu!* who is that pretty, smiling, blue-eyed girl hanging on young Martel's arm," said Ernest, quizzing them through his eye-glass, "and looking up so lovingly into his face?"

"Oh! that's Adolphine Vivroux—did you never hear of Adolphine the blue-eyed Belle of Beaufays—the good-tempered little Notary's Intended, of Chenée—? Denis has no chance there."

"By Castor and Pollux!" exclaimed Ernest, "they seem made for each other—if her heart is another's, her eyes are evidently her own."

"Every one loves Denis so much," said Agnes, "all regard him with approving smiles; and no wonder—he is so good, so kind, so generous!"

"He must, indeed, be a favourite with every one," replied Ernest, "if he has Mademoiselle Florenville's good opinion. *C'est dommage*, though, that he's not some inches

taller; for, by Hercules! his features and figure are not so bad."

"Bad? *ma foi!* Monr. Rathère, you must not talk thus at Beaufays," exclaimed Agnes, smiling, and with a slight heightening of the colour, "I can tell you Denis is unrivalled in the estimation of our prettiest maidens."

"*Vraiment?*" replied Rathère, smoothing down his moustache, and adjusting his cravat—"*chacun à son goût,*" you know, Mademoiselle;—I thought women generally gave the preference to dark men."

"For my own part," observed Agnes, and checking herself suddenly, she added, playfully—"it's fortunate for the fair ones that we women are not all of the same mind."

"*Oui—oui,*" acquiesced Rathère, with great animation; "but Mademoiselle Florenville's own taste, ever correct, shall decide it—to which now, candidly, gives Mademoiselle Agnes the preference?"

"*Ah—mon Dieu!* her judgment," replied Agnes, "in such weighty matters, is not worth a pin. What matters colour or com-

plexion? surely it is the disposition that imparts the chief beauty to the expression—the same vices as well as virtues are veiled under light skins no less than dark—it is the heart's complexion alone that is worthy a prudent maiden's second thought."

"*C'est vrai,*" assented Rathère, slightly embarrassed, but recovering himself in a moment, "alas! what heart is immaculate enough for Agnes Florenville?"

"*Fi, donc!* now, that is too bad of you," laughed Agnes—you are quizzing me, Monr. Ernest."

"Nay, by Jupiter, I swear!"

"Hush—hush!" interrupted Agnes—"so simple-minded are we at Embourg, Monr. Ernest, that even flattery is lost upon us."

"May I perish," vehemently exclaimed Rathère, "if every word that has passed these lips to-night is not the heart-felt language of sincerity and devotion."

"*Ah, malheureusement!* for us poor simple maids of Embourg—we know not even how to interpret, you see, the meaning of courtly phrase or compliment."

"Is it then flattery, dear Mademoiselle Agnes," continued Ernest, with an impassioned air, "to praise and glorify nature's fairest works—to desire to rescue from obscurity its most precious gifts—to snatch the diamond from the dark mine, the gem from the ocean's depths—to transplant the sweetest fruits and flowers into a more genial soil, where their beauties can be appreciated, and their value understood: would it be wisdom—would it be justice, to leave them to perish in darkness, unknown, unnoticed,—to wither and "waste their fragrance on the desert air?"

"*Ah, ma foi!* Monr. Rathère, what would you think of me if I were to believe one half the fine speeches you have made to me to-night?"

"It is the evidence of true worth," replied Rathère, "to be ever diffident of its own merits."

"I affect not to misunderstand you, Monr. Rathère," said Agnes, "simple-minded as I am:—you would excite in me as much admira-

tion and longing for the gay glittering world beyond these mountains, as you would fain have me believe that world would manifest for me:—what if I am happy where I am?"

"The diamond," pleaded Ernest, "would be contented to remain for ever buried in the dark mine."

"And for all purposes of utility," rejoined Agnes, "might there be suffered to remain for ever."

"*Mon Dieu!* is it not a scandal to all sense and good reason," pursued Rathère, somewhat puzzled with his own doctrine, and forgetting that the comparison was of his own drawing, "to be lowering the glorious attributes of human excellence to a level with gems and jewels—certes, without utility, there is but doubtful worth—but there can be little wisdom without knowledge, and where, but in constant intercourse with an enlightened world, can that knowledge be acquired?"

"But if ignorance be bliss," said Agnes, "it may be sometimes folly to be wise."

"To a mind constituted like Madelle Florenville's," urged Rathère, "knowledge could only be productive of gratification to herself and benefit to all around her."

"That depends rather on the quality than the quantity, does it not, Monr. Rathère?"

"A judicious discernment like Madelle Florenville's could always discriminate between the good and bad."

"Experience," observed Agnes, "is not always in favour of even the best worldly wisdom, but ever of contentment."

"Madelle has no doubt read," continued Rathère, "the English poet's charming story of the happy valley," which if ever there was an elysium on earth, was one;—alas! was Rasselas happy?"

"No," said Agnes, "because he looked for more than in this life of chance and changes can be ever found:—did he return to the valley happier than he left it?"

"For the best of reasons certainly not," replied Rathère—"with no companion on his way but the cold stern precepts of philosophy

ever at his elbow to check every youthful aspiration, to restrain and mortify each generous impulse—to discourage all ardour or enthusiasm, to inculcate suspicion, to foster distrust at every turn, the heart's best affections lay dormant and uncherished. Thus, the acquisition of knowledge only served to make him more and more sensible of his own unhappiness, and envious of those who, happily knowing the grand *arcanum* of true felicity, searched for it—like real philosophers—not among the musty doctrines of hermits and misanthropes, but where alone it was to be found—in the bonds of mutual love."

"Ah! I see, I see," interrupted Agnes, smiling, "instead of old Imlac for a Mentor, you would have sent him on his travels with some gentle, generous, confiding Abyssinian maid, in whose care and counsels he would have found an unerring guide—a never-failing source of encouragement and consolation in every trial; confident that in each other's tender support no evil could betide them, and that, their wanderings over, perhaps

before the waning of the honeymoon, they would have returned to the happy valley examples of virtue, wisdom, and unceasing love."

"*Charmant! charmant!*" rapturously exclaimed Ernest, mistaking the sweet smiles and cheerful sallies of his lovely companion for admiration of his conversational powers and acquiescence in his sentiments, and thinking that the moment had arrived for the avowal of his passion—"yes, Agnes—dearest Agnes!—it is indeed to woman's tender love—to woman's gentle care and guidance that man must look for his best mentor in his pilgrimage through life:—without *her* for his counsellor and companion, unaided by her endeavours, unencouraged by her example, unsolaced by her sympathy and affection, what would his existence be but a barren desert, unillumined by one star of hope to direct and cheer him on his lonely way; but with *her* ever at his side, to warn, to soothe, encourage and assist him, what pride, what delight together to brave every danger,

and partake of every joy:—yes, it is in the sweet companionship of woman's love alone that the true philosophy of man's happiness is ever learnt—with her for his sure and steadfast trust—his anchorage—his leading star—with such as Agnes for his guide and guardian angel—"

"*Tenez! tenez!* Monr. Ernest," interrupted Agnes, "remember, I entreat you, that flattery is lost on the simple maids of Embourg."

"But not the language of sincerity and devotion," continued Ernest, passionately;" "nay, hear me, dearest Agnes! a heart so generous as your's cannot be insensible to the emotions inspired by its own matchless goodness. If it be a sin to love that which all the world adores, then, by heaven! is Ernest Rathère most guilty. O! turn not thus away;—say but that he is not indifferent to you—let him but hope that he may be one day perhaps worthy of your confidence, and there is no sacrifice but he would joyfully make for the reward of your esteem: consent

but to be his guide—his monitress—his leading star—his guardian spirit, and— "

"Monr. Rathère," again interrupted Agnes, much excited, and suddenly extricating her hand from Rathère's grasp, "this is mere folly; — I entreat you, Monr. — nay, I must insist— "

"Hear me!" exclaimed Ernest, with unabashed vehemence—seeing that the signal had been given for the re-commencement of dancing, and that they were left almost alone and unobserved—"beloved as I know these justly-cherished scenes of home and family and kindred must be, and worthy of your tenderest regard as undoubtedly they are; still, there are other scenes beyond these rude bleak cheerless mountains far brighter and more genial, waiting to welcome you to a new life of joy and usefulness.—O, Agnes! awake from the dream that has too long kept you ignorant of your own merits; — shall charms, never surpassed, be doomed to waste unknown, unnoticed, in these remote uncivilized regions?—no, no! you were born to

better things;—wealth, honour and happiness await you—O say but that you will be mine, and there is not a wish of your heart but it shall be the study of Ernest Rathère's life to see fulfilled. I am rich, as you know, and although, from sordid motives, my father, who makes gold his idol, would blindly sacrifice my happiness to his ambition, when once united, believe me he would love you as his own child. Nay, weep not—life is full of joy and promise for those who can avail themselves of its best gifts—fear you the reproach and negligence of my friends? then fly with me;—to-morrow shall witness our nuptials—nay, by Heaven! if thou wilt, this night the ocean shall flow between us and these mountains—and in each other's love, what evil can overtake us?"

During this frantic rhapsody, in which Rathère, blinded by vanity and selfishness and carried away by the impetuosity of his passions, seemed to have lost all sense even of discretion, Agnes sat as if stupified with amazement; and when he paused, and gazed

with a look of triumph on her flushed cheeks, down which the tears of anger and mortification were fast rolling, he mistook those silent heralds of his own shame for the confirmation of his successful suit; and, hurried on by the ungovernable ardour of his temper, and losing at length all control over himself, he threw his arms round the form of the indignant girl, and, straining her to his side, endeavoured to imprint a kiss upon her lips.

In a moment the meekness of the lamb was changed into the fury of the lioness, as, bounding with the rapidity of lightning from his side, she exclaimed—indignation and defiance flashing from her eyes—"Villain! is it thus you reward our hospitality? Away! away! lest I send one, who, although immeasurably your inferior in wealth, as far excels you for true worth as virtue does vice, to scourge you from our threshold;" saying which, and waving her hand in token of an eternal farewell, Agnes hastened to rejoin her friends.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT the scene just described had not passed wholly unobserved; for Denis Martel, having resigned the blue-eyed belle of Beaufays to the little Notary, and urged by an irresistible curiosity to account for Agnes' long *téte à téte* with the young Chevalier, had strolled back almost unconsciously towards a retired alley adjoining the "Champs Elysées," nearly opposite to which they were sitting; so that he could plainly distinguish their forms through the openings of the trees, without seeming to be a spy upon their movements. His surprise may be imagined when he suddenly beheld the fair form of the Maid of Embourg struggling in the embrace of his

rival, and the next moment Agnes spring from his side and hasten, evidently much agitated and incensed, up the avenue. In a moment he was hurrying—with what precise motive he hardly as yet knew himself—towards the wicket by which she must re-enter the orchard, when Agnes, perceiving his approach, "Ah, Denis!" said she, with one of her sweetest smiles and endeavouring to resume her usual composure, "give me your arm—you have danced with me but once tonight, you truant!"

Burning with desire to hear some explanation of the extraordinary scene he had just witnessed, twenty times was the question uppermost in his thoughts on Denis' lips, as he led his lovely mistress to a seat; but, as she made no allusion to the subject herself, the fear of appearing inquisitive restrained him, and he was doomed to bear all the tortures of doubt and suspense which the events just related were so calculated to give rise to.

To indemnify himself, however, in some

measure for the disappointment, and impelled by one of those unaccountable freaks which actuate the hearts of lovers, instigating them to conceive and do the most contradictory things, Denis thought he would go and seek Ernest Rathère—he would voluntarily and unnecessarily hasten to meet the man whom of all beings on earth, in his heart he most wished at that moment a thousand miles off. With what precise intention he was so eager to beard the lion he had probably not even asked himself—whether with friendly or hostile purpose the issue alone could prove.

Perhaps there is a fascination in the near approximation to danger irresistible to some dispositions, and which they rather seek to face than fly from. So strangely constructed are some natures that they will walk deliberately into the very jaws of certain death, rather than not gratify the impulse that goads them on. However this might be with Denis, he seemed to have an insuperable desire to confront, that night, his powerful rival; and separating himself from the dancers, and

entering the "Champs Elysées," he walked quickly on towards the spot where Agnes had occupied a seat with him but so short a time before. Every bench was now vacant, and he was about to retrace his steps, vexed and disappointed, when he thought he distinguished Rathère's giant form pacing hurriedly backwards and forwards under the shade of a thick straggling clump of fir trees that skirted the extremity of the meadow, close to where a narrow bridle path, separated from the enclosure by a low fence and thickly overshadowed by luxuriant hedge wood, joined the main road to the village. Confident that it must be the bulky figure of his rival, whose Herculean proportions nothing diminished by reflection left no doubt of his identity, Denis made straight for the object of his search, and in a few moments had reached the spot where he stood.

"*Votre serviteur*, Monr. Rathère," said Denis, raising his cap and casting a searching glance at the lowering countenance of the young merchant.

Rathère started, and for a moment the blood left his cheeks pale as ashes; for believing that Denis, whose arm he had seen Agnes take immediately after their separation, had been made acquainted with what had passed, he now regarded him, naturally enough, as his bitterest enemy. His heart, however, leaped at the thought that an opportunity now presented itself, perhaps, for crushing him and all his hopes for ever. Could he but fix a quarrel on him—could he but aggravate him to only the expression of a word capable of offensive construction, and he had too much confidence in his own superior strength and skill in the art of self-defence, to have any fear of the issue of a combat with so insignificant an opponent.

"Ah, Monr. le Fermier!" exclaimed Rathère to Denis' salutation, "have the bright eyes of the damsels of Embourg lost their charms, that so constant a gallant as Denis Martel thus early plays them truant?"

"Pardon," replied Denis, "might I not put the same question with more reason to Monr. Rathère?"

"*Sacre bleu!* but this is mere cruelty, Monr. Martel, to leave yonder gay scenes so long in darkness—I pray you hasten back, if only for the sake of the blue-eyed Belle of Beaufays."

"Nay, I crave your pardon, Monr. Rathère," said Denis, "if so brilliant a luminary as Monr. Ernest Rathère can withdraw himself from those gay scenes, and yet some light is left—so mean a star as Denis Martel may hide his head awhile and, by St. Michael! not be even missed."

"*Sacre bleu!* but thou canst bandy words bravely to-night, Monr. le Fermier:—may I crave to know to what happy chance I am indebted," savagely demanded Rathère, "for the honour of this unexpected *rencontre* with Monr. Denis Martel?"

"*Excusez*, Monr." replied Denis, "this *rencontre* is partly accidental, and partly intentional on my part."

"You are pleased, sir, to speak in riddles," said Rathère, "have the goodness to explain yourself—wherefore this intrusion on my privacy?"

"Monr. Rathère," replied Denis, "you are a man—you profess to be a gentleman; answer me—you have offered insult this night to the best and loveliest of her sex?"

As if struck dumb with amazement at the assurance of this speech from one whom he regarded as little better than a *paysan*, Rathère stood for a moment mute with astonishment. "Now, may Heaven be merciful to us!" gasped he at length, his lips quivering with suppressed rage, "thou art a bold champion, and doest thy *devoir* right manfully:—doubtless such zeal will not go unrequited by the loveliest of her sex."

"You evade my question, Monr. Rathère," replied Denis, calmly but firmly:—perhaps Mademoiselle Florenville—"

"Ha! what of Mademoiselle Florenville?" interrupted Rathère, his whole frame trembling with emotion at the recollection of his defeat, and the consciousness that he stood convicted before so despised a rival, "speak—speak—nay, trifle not with me, or by the powers of hell! you shall rue this braggart

bearing—speak, I say—what of Agnes Florenville—has she dared to?—"

"Hold—hold!" cried Denis, dashing aside the heavy hand that was laid on his shoulder, and approaching so close to the broad chest of his gigantic adversary as almost to touch it, "think not I come to discover secrets best hidden for ever in the heart that gave them birth; no—no, Ernest Rathère, I have not sought you to take advantage of your fears; but to demand of you—as a man, if you have not this night done foul wrong and indignity to one who, by every law of honour and hospitality, you were bound to shield from injury and respect?"

"Have you finished?" asked Rathère in a subdued tone and careless air—which ill accorded with the visible fury with which he was bursting—"*certes*, if 'the loveliest of her sex' has thought fit to make Monr. Martel her confessor, it is but meet that Ernest Rathère should do the same."

"By Heaven! you wrong her, Monr. Rathère—you know not Agnes Florenville's no-

ble nature:—not a word, I pledge my life on it, that has passed this night between you, has she breathed to me, or to any other living soul — your secret, never fear, is no less sacred in her keeping than in mine."

"Now, by the holy rood!" fiercely retorted Rathère, "you prove yourself a base audacious slanderer—for if, as you say, 'the loveliest of her sex' has been so wondrous discreet, what knowledge can Monr. Denis Martel have of—"

"That," replied Denis, calmly, "which the evidence of my own eyes has told me."

"Ha! say you so?" muttered Ernest, between his clenched teeth, "then am I deeply indebted to your courtesy, Monr. Martel; and now, sir, have you aught else to say?"

"But a word," replied Denis, looking fixedly on his formidable rival,—"Ernest Rathère, farewell! You have called me slanderer—I forgive you; I dread your malice as little as I need your praise; but beware how you ever again breathe, even with levity, that spotless name which all who know it vene-

rate and respect;" saying which, he raised his cap and was turning to leave the spot, when—

"Stay—stay!" cried Rathère, almost choked with passion, "bravely acted, by Hercules! but think you, valiant sir, to go thus unrequited—I have listened patiently to all your insults, now then hear me—yes—yes—by all the powers of heaven and hell, you shall! nay—you would foil me thus; then, will I no longer parley with so base a craven, but thus will teach him how the caitiff fares that beards his master"—saying which, maddened with rage, he rushed upon his victim; and seizing him unawares with his almost superhuman strength round the body, with both hands lifted him from the earth, and, collecting all his force, was about to hurl him to the ground, when sounds of approaching footsteps and several voices in high glee coming towards them, caught his ear.

"Ten thousand curses on them!" growled Rathère, suddenly relinquishing his hold, "thanks to those mummers, vile hound! you

still have breath—but we shall meet again where there will be none to interrupt us."

"Villain!" cried Denis, as soon as he could speak, "that was a coward's trick—you took me by surprise—but now we know each other—come on, if you dare to face me like a man."

"Not now," muttered Rathère; "we shall meet, I say, again;" and clearing the fence by which they stood, with a bound, he disappeared.

Hardly had Denis time to adjust his dress which had been woefully disarranged during his terrible struggle with Rathère, when the merry little band of *Chanteurs*, whose opportune approach at so critical a moment had perhaps saved his life, headed by the good-humoured little Notary of Chenée, came up, singing at the top of their voices, but with perfect melody, snatches of favourite popular ballads; evidently, to judge from their mirth, much to their own satisfaction.

"Ah Denis, my boy!" exclaimed Emille, "we have been looking for you everywhere

—*pardieu!* you look as gloomy as though the Maid of Embourg had not smiled on you for four-and-twenty hours—come—come—faint heart wins not woman's favour—*allons!* I've won a bottle of sauterne from Marc Dombret about the color of Adolphine's eyebrows, and we want you to come and help us drink it to the health of our sweethearts — so, *allons!*" and on went those joyous spirits to the merry tune of—

"Lisette, ma Lisette,
Tu m'as trompé toujours;
Mais vive la grisette,
Je veux, Lisette,
Boir à nos amours."

then, breaking off with one accord into a different measure, on they went dancing and capering to the tune of the little Notary's favourite—

"Heureux villageois dansons
Sautez, fillettes
Et garçons!
Unissez vos joyeux sons
Musettes
Et chansons!"

till, arriving at one of Madame Jacques'

tempting little tables daintily spread under a delicious alcove of luxuriant acacias for the especial patronage of such convivial spirits as Monr. Emille *le Notaire* and his friends, their mirth seemed gradually to take, if not so melodious, by no means a less joyous turn over the discussion of her far famed salads and sauterne.

Pleading his engagement to Mademoiselle Florenville, Denis succeeded, though not without difficulty, in disengaging himself from his festive companions; and hastening, as the prelude for the next dance struck up, to where Agnes was sitting surrounded by a gay circle of admiring friends, he claimed the promise of her hand for the next quadrille.

To have seen Agnes Florenville at that moment, no one would have supposed that ought had ever happened to ruffle even the placid current of her thoughts, much less that she had been that night a principal actor in a scene—calculated more than any other to disturb the tranquillity of a gentle maiden's bosom. Wisely judging that to make any

mention of what had occurred in the "Champs Elysées" would distress the minds of her friends, and throw a damp over the day's pleasures without any good result, she generously determined to keep her secret to herself; feeling that instinctive dread, natural to sensitive minds, which shrinks from popular observation, and not doubting but that Rathère, after the repulse he had received, would immediately leave the grounds, and so remove the possibility of a further *rencontre*. Nor was she apprehensive that his disappearance would create much surprise, for it was hardly to be expected that a cavalier of Monr. Ernest Rathère's pretensions would condescend to patronize with his distinguished presence such humble scenes, beyond the passing hour during which the flutter and sensation of his appearance were at their height. When Denis, therefore, advanced to lead her to the dance, not a cloud was visible on her brow; and taking his arm with a more gracious smile than ever, in truth not a happier heart

was there in all Embourg than was then beating in the breast of Agnes Florenville.

"There, now! we are too late again," complained the blue eyed Belle of Beaufays to her partner—as they came up panting with the haste they had made, close to where Denis and Agnes were standing, apparently waiting for another couple—"how provoking! really, Monr. Emille, your unfortunate *penchant* for the wine cup will end in some dreadful calamity some day."

Emille laid all the blame to Marc Dombret. "Ma foi!" laughed Adolphine, "and Marc would have pledged me his life just now that but for Monr. Emille's salads and sauterne he should have been the most thriving *Notaire* of Liége. I'faith!—a pretty pair—Heaven comfort the poor maiden who entrust her happiness to either."

"Ah—Mademoiselle Adolphine!—this is fortunate," said Denis—seeing the maid of Beaufays' disappointment, and guessing the cause—"come Emille—we can't wait for Marc and Rosalie any longer—you will be our *vis-à-vis*, instead."

"*Oui — oui!*" cried Emille — pulling his partner delightedly by the arm towards their places — "it would be altogether useless, Mademoiselle Florenville, to wait for that reprobate Marc, who has just ordered another bottle of sauterne in honour of all the fair maids of Embourg and Beaufays."

"Suppose then we form a set," said Denis, smiling, to Adolphine, "we are all deeply bounden to Marc — eh Mademoiselle Vivroux?"

Adolphine's blue eyes looked unutterable things at Denis, which perhaps it was as well that Agnes did not see. The truth is nothing could possibly have happened more in unison with Adolphine's wishes than Denis' proposal, by accepting which she would have ample opportunity of indulging her favorite pastime of quizzing on a good humoured scale, which, indeed, is the only mode of quizzing under any circumstances admissible. We may rest assured that never were those laughing loquacious blue eyes more agreeably engaged than on the present occasion; and when at the conclusion of the dance

she hurried Emille away for a confidential lover's chat, it would have puzzled a conjuror to decide whose happiness and welfare were uppermost in her thoughts — the lovely maid of Embourg's or her own.

"Did you see?" whispered she, pinching poor Emille's arm so hard as almost to make him cry, "now only think—and to have been *tête-à-tête* with young Rathère under the trees there, for nearly an hour—well, if Denis is satisfied — it's nothing to any one else. What a fine thing to have as many lovers at your feet almost as there are days in the week — dark and fair — tall and short — *ma foi!* it's well to be Agnes Florenville. And how happy Denis looked, and how nicely he dances:—really, Monr. Emille, you must take some lessons of Monr. Delplanque — you are by no means perfect in the *pas seul*."—

"Well, I may be wrong," interrupted Emille, "but I would'nt give a *centime* for Denis' chance with such a rival as Ernest Rathère:—it's my opinion that Denis Martel has no more chance than I have."

"You! *mon Dieu!* and it's my opinion that she dotes on him to distraction"—said Adolphine.

"*Vraiment?*" exclaimed Rathère.

"*Oui, vraiment,*" replied Adolphine—"you know Adolphine Vivroux's penetration—I am as sure of it as I live."

"*Vraiment!*" repeated Emille, musingly—"that's very important:—tell Denis that, and you'll make him your slave for life; and, heigh-ho! who knows," he continued, dropping his voice and assuming a dejected air, "if after all it should happen (beauty is so capricious) that Rathère wins the prize, but that he might go farther that the Belle of Beaufays and fare worse."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Adolphine—"the Belle of Beaufays play second fiddle to the Belle of Embourg? *merci*, Monr. Emille—I thought you knew me better."

"There was a time I know," sighed Emille, with his eyes still fixed on the ground, "that you used to tell me—'none but brown eyes and raven locks should ever steal Adolphine Vivroux's heart away.'"

"Ah but I had to learn then, don't you see, Emille?—that black hair is inconstant, and brown eyes fickle."

"*Bien—bien!* returned Emille, venturing a scrutinizing glance at the grave countenance of his mistress—which seemed to give him courage, "there's Paul Malherb, then, with the azure orbs and flaxen wig; what say you to Paul?—he doats on you."

"*Mon Dieu!* a happy thought."

"Or poor Germain," continued Emille, "with the auburn locks and green spectacles?"

"Worse and worse—go on."

"Or—ah, I've hit it—Marc Dombret himself with those celestial Chinese eyes and sandy moustache, who is spending his last francpiece there drinking pottle deep healths to the maids of Embourg and Beaufays?"

"Ah, *ma foi!* that's better—once more, *mon cher.*"

"*Pardieu!* I shall never please you if I try till doomsday. What think you of poor Emille, who they say loves you to distraction,

and is pining himself into a shadow for you —*Malheureusement!* I forgot *his* hair is black and his eyes dark brown—but are not Agnes Florenville's also dark as night, and whoever said Agnes was false or fickle?"

"But don't you see, you silly thing! how she lavishes her smiles on all alike:—think you if I were Denis I would play number two to the best number one in all Liége? —No—no, *mon cher*—if I found black fickle, I'd try blue; that's only fair, eh, Monr. Emille?"

"And between two stools, you know," reminded Emille.

"Fall to the ground," cried Adolphine, laughing outright, in spite of her gravity, "take the veil, and die an old maid? *merci beaucoup. Tenez, tenez!* look, as I live, there is Agnes going to dance again with Denis—then, it's a settled thing—so now, if you are very good and grateful, as you ought to be, you shall be my partner once more—only promise not to squeeze my waist so tight, or tread on my toes. Have the kindness—*merci*

—there, there—that will do beautifully. So you really think a cherry-coloured silk hooded mantle *is* becoming? Ah, a valtz *bon!* now mind how you behave, and don't put me out, or I'll be Madame Marc Dombret—just to spite you."

Merrily went the music, and on went the dancing, increasing, if possible, in attraction as the night wore away. But one feeling—that of universal delight seemed to beam in every face. Little differences and misunderstandings that had too long kept friends and neighbours asunder, were all forgotten and made up; fraternity in its best sense was the order of the day, and every thing, under its genial influence, contributed to make that day one of the happiest that Embourg had ever known.

Midnight had long passed before even the oldest inhabitants began to consult their watches, and think of returning to their homes. One by one they dropped off, seemingly loath to tear themselves away till the latest moment from the fascinating scenes of

their youthful days. The night's festivities were drawing to their close, but the stars still shone like countless diamonds in the cloudless heavens — the torches burnt undimmed; the untiring efforts of the musicians to keep all hearts in harmony were unabated — one only resolution seemed to be uppermost in every breast, as the time of separation advanced—the determination, and a very sensible one it was, to make the most of pleasure while it lasted; and when at length the moment for parting *adieux*, and acknowledgments, and mutual congratulations arrived, if there was one point more than another upon which all were unanimous—it was that never, in the memory of the oldest stager, had *fête* day passed off at Embourg with greater *éclat*.

But where was Ernest Rathère—why was he not one among that happy throng—why were scenes productive only of innocent enjoyment to others, gall and bitterness to him alone? Alas! how true it is that our passions are ever the sure instruments of our own self-

inflictions. Perhaps no young man of his age had oftener tested by personal experience, the justice of this most righteous law, or profited less by its friendly warnings than Ernest Rathère.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH a mind in which almost every evil passion was at work, after his encounter with Denis, Rathère cast a last savage look on those happy scenes from which his own selfishness alone had excluded him; and taking a by-path that led by a circuitous route to the village, walked moodily on, hardly knowing whither his steps were leading him. At length quickening his pace, as if determined by some sudden resolution, he turned down a narrow gloomy passage, at the extremity of which, as we have seen, stood the dwelling of the Prophetess of Embourg.

With that peculiar sympathy which seems to draw together kindred spirits — holding in

one link, as it were, their inclinations and interests—Rathère felt an irresistible desire to hold communion that night with Jacqueline Dodon. It was not his first visit by many to her cottage; for, thoroughly imbued—like most of his countrymen—with those superstitious notions which ignorance and prejudice, under the degrading dominion of a bigoted creed, invariably engender, he had often sought the aid of prophecy in the prosecution of his intrigues. He was well aware, too, that neither Agnes Florenville nor Denis Martel were favourites of the Prophetess; for with much stronger minds than are generally found in persons of their class, coupled with, or rather the result of an unflinching regard for truth—that severest test of the purity of all creeds—every endeavour of Jacqueline's to enlist them among the number of her votaries had been in vain. This, he knew, was a very sore point with the Prophetess: the indifference in which her skill was held, especially by Mademoiselle Florenville, whose example influenced so many others, was, in-

deed, a daily increasing source of disquiet to her avaricious thoughts: could she but have secured Agnes and Denis' patronage, all would have been well; as it was, she saw with concern the gradual decline of her power, and what was of still greater consequence to her covetousness, the decrease of her unhallowed gains; and terrible were the maledictions her enmity called down on their innocent and unsuspicious heads.

No one, therefore, could be a fitter sympathizer with Rathère in his present mood than Jacqueline Dodon, to whom he had resolved to unbosom his troubles and apply for consolation and advice.

At first he had hesitated to disturb her at so unseasonable an hour; but remembering that many of her principal consultations were held — for a sufficient consideration — at all times of the night, he determined to rely on the same argument for a favourable reception; and knocking resolutely at her door, like one assured of a ready welcome, waited patiently till it might please her to admit

him. After a short delay, the glimmering of a lamp was perceptible through the parlour casement, and in a few moments afterwards the door was cautiously opened by Pauline, who, half dressed and holding a lighted taper in one hand, pointed with the other to a room close by, into which Rathère — muttering curses at the poor staring girl for keeping him waiting so long—entered without further ceremony; and throwing himself into a chair, kept his eyes fixed on the black curtain, through which, he knew, the Prophetess would presently make her appearance.

More than ten minutes—which to Rathère's impatience seemed as many hours—elapsed, before that awful curtain was drawn aside; when, enveloped in a long loose robe of divers patterns, deeply embroidered down the front and round the cuffs with the most fantastical devices, and drawn round the waist by a thick worsted cord, pointed at each end with a silver cross, in crawled Jacqueline Dodon — the Prophetess of Embourg. Her coarse white hair, now unconfined either by

cap or handkerchief, was tied back from her wrinkled forehead with a narrow fillet of black velvet, and hung in matted disorder down her neck and shoulders. Agitated by so unexpected a summons, and excited by the expectation of gain, her palsied hands and knees shook so, that although supported by two crutches, she could hardly keep her balance; and the night air aggravating the spasmodic cough—her constant companion for the last twenty years—altogether gave her face so convulsed and horrible an appearance, that even Rathère—whose nervous perceptions were none of the most sensitive, and who, but for his own sake, would have beheld her die like a dog before him unmoved—could not repress a shudder as she fell back into her chair, seemingly struggling for sufficient breath to demand the cause of his unseasonable visit.

"*Peste* seize the nasty rheum!" gasped she, at length, as soon as she could articulate, "these midnight counsels will be my death; and, ah, Jesus Mario! who will then supply

Jacqueline Dodon's place?—But what brings the brave Chevalier Ernest Rathère to the Pfophetess to-night?—ah, *mon Dieu!* some mishap?"

"Mother, I will be deceived no longer," exclaimed Rathère, surlily—"she loves another."

"*Tenez! tenez!*—ah! jealousy, jealousy:—and is it for this that the handsomest gallant of Liége leaves the bright eyes of our prettiest maidens to mourn his absence? *ma foi!* when Jacqueline was a girl——*sacre!* this rheum will kill me—the youths of Embourg would have thought it too soon to quit the ball by cock-crow."

"I tell you, Mother, the brightest eyes of Embourg smile not on me:—she loves another."

"Another, foolish boy—whom, whom?"

"By Hercules! your wisdom must be strangely dull to-night, Mother, or you would know without my telling you."

"Now, by St. Lambert! you wrong both my affection and my skill;—*voyons, voyons!*"

continued Jacqueline, putting on a pair of spectacles, and turning over the leaves of a large clasped and richly-mounted volume before her, "*voyons!—ah, c'est vrai—c'est cela;* —you speak of Denis Martel."

"Ten thousand curses on him!" exclaimed Rathère, grinding his teeth.

"*Chut—chut!*" replied Jacqueline, "curse not him, but rather your own pusillanimity that brooks so mean a rival."

"What, if she loves him," demanded Rathère, "and treats my passion with disdain?"

"*Ce n'est rien:* I tell you, Ernest Rathère, you know not the sex; your own headstrong folly—not her frowns—have foiled you."

"By Heaven! I said but a word or two of love, and she spurned me from her like a dog."

"*Tenez, tenez—ce n'est rien:* I tell you 'twill be your own fault if ever Denis Martel call Agnes Florenville his bride."

"Now, may hell itself confound me!" cried Rathère, approaching the table, and striking it a heavy blow with his clenched fist, "if that base hound shall triumph over me:—tell

me, show me but how I may best rid myself of that detested cur, and, by the Mother of Jesus! my gratitude—"

"Ah, *ma foi!* thy gratitude!—'twould not so much as purchase an *ave* for my soul in purgatory."

"Then, by the blessed Virgin, and all my hopes of pardon! I swear—"

"*Chut—chut!* I wouldn't trust a hair upon them."

"Then, gold—gold!—show me but how I may make Agnes Florenville mine, and here is gold."

"How much?—'tis a game requires skill to play."

"This purse filled with brave new *louis d'ors.*"

"*Bon—bon!* there's more sense in that. *Attendez!*—you know the Count Ferdinand d'Omburg?"

"None better, he is my dearest friend."

"Hark ye—he would give twice as much for such a prize, and pay, too, in advance."

"Ferdinand d'Omburg," Mother, "is ever fortunate."

"Ah, he is a gentle generous youth, a gallant youth—and well deserves the smiles of fortune—ever gracious to the brave."

"By St. Denis! Ernest Rathère can be as generous as Ferdinand d'Ombourg. If to-night's oracles are propitious, thy magic cup filled to the brim with double pieces shall be but a small earnest of my gratitude—*Voilà!*" added Rathère, throwing his purse on the table, "this take, as a present guerdon; and now—what luck for me to-night? much I fear there are nought but dark shadows in my destiny."

"*Courage, courage! mon ami,*" chuckled The Prophetess, clutching the well-filled purse with her bony fingers, and depositing it with glistening eyes in her bosom—"*voyons!*" continued she—muttering to herself as she pored over the pages of the miraculous volume—"*ah! c'est cela:*—weather fair and settled—Diana near the full—conjunction of Jupiter and Venus—*bon!*—favourable to Hymen's votaries:—ah! Saturn soon in opposition to Mars—augurs evil and danger, to be

met by strength and stratagem: *oui, c'est cela!* —then there is no time to spare—the game must be played, and the stake won—or, by St. Dympa! it will be lost for ever.

"*Sacre!*" exclaimed Rathère, starting from his seat and pacing up and down the room, "did I not say that there were none but threatening shadows in my horoscope?"

"*Courage, donc!*" replied the Prophetess, "as yet the heavenly aspects are propitious —with speed and resolution all may yet be well."

"Tell me," vehemently cried Rathère, stopping short, "how I can crush the reptile that now crosses my path, and Jacqueline shall see that Ernest Rathère is not the man to shrink from danger, were all the fiends of darkness leagued against him!"

"'Tis well; but patience—patience"—smiled Jacqueline, raising herself up from her chair with the help of a hand crutch—"there is no truth in the heavens if aught occur to dim the brightness of Ernest Rathère's career—But, *voyons!* what say our other oracles?" and, hobbling to the cherry-

tree escritoir, she unlocked a secret drawer, took from it a pack of cards and a white porcelain coffee-cup, and, returning to her seat, placed them by her side on the table; while Rathère, taking his place immediately opposite her, awaited in anxious impatience the further unfolding of his fortunes.

To those uninitiated in the mysteries of the craft as practised by such eminent professors of the *vaticinal* art as the Prophetess of Embourg, it may not be uninteresting nor out of place to say a few words in elucidation of the scene we are about to witness, as acted in the little parlour of Jacqueline Dodon. Nor is it a subject so trivial as some, at first sight, may suppose; for, whether we take into consideration the devoted faith involved, or the important results to which that faith often gives rise—frequently leading to most disastrous and sometimes to tragical consequences—the pernicious influence of such characters as the Prophetess of Embourg over the minds of their ignorant and superstitious votaries can hardly be over-rated.

Now, there are various modes of fortune

telling practised from almost time immemorial by the wisest and greatest of their age. It is well known that Alexander and Peter the Great never undertook an expedition of importance without first consulting some favorite oracle. Napoleon invariably kept a small pack of cards in his pocket to which he referred with the most implicit faith and confidence on the eve of all his battles; and the Fourteenth Louis—the most illustrious character of his times—was never without an astrologer and alchymist in his pay, to whom he had recourse in all cases of danger or perplexity.

Many of our own statesmen and commanders, military and naval, have been deeply imbued with a superstitious belief in the efficacy of oracular consultations. Indeed, fortune telling, in one shape or another, seems ever to have been a popular refuge in times of doubt or difficulty with people of all nations. Among the lower classes especially it is eagerly embraced as an infallible resource in all emergencies; and, when sought for

pastime only, every one knows with what a strange mixture of feelings the village swains and maidens will give their last shilling to have the lines in their hands read by the sloe black eyes of some dark browed Spae-wife, skilled, like all her tribe, in unravelling the mysteries of futurity; and, be their affected incredulity or pretended indifference to the virtues of palmistry however great it may, how downcast and disappointed they look if they don't get a good twelve-penny-worth for their shilling.

But of all the modes of fortune-telling most in vogue, and which, in spite of the many laudable societies for the diffusion of useful knowledge, and the suppression of quacks and impostors, seem to retain unshaken possession of public favour, the use of the Cards and Coffee Cup stand preeminent. Some give the preference to the one, some to the other; but the essential purpose of both is pretty much the same — viz — to discover by particular positions, appearances and conjunctions, certain resulting indications of good

and evil — success or disappointment — constancy or fickleness — treachery or fidelity, misery or happiness; by which the fortunes of all who seek their prophetic aid are foretold with an accuracy inconceivable to any but true believers.

With respect to the cards — the oracles chiefly in repute—there are so many exceptions and modifications resulting from different positions — aspects — combinations and conjunctions, that it is somewhat difficult, unless thoroughly versed in the art, to comprehend it in all its details. The following outline of some of the main features, however, will suffice for our present purpose, and enable the inexperienced reader to follow The Prophetess in the curious scene about to be described—an exhibition of discernment and dexterity unsurpassed in the history of prophetic ingenuity.

As a general rule, the red cards are heralds of good luck; the black, more especially the Spades, of the reverse. Hearts the best of all, ever harbingers of joy and glad tidings,

their court cards representatives of auburn hair and fair complexions. The Ace the best card in the pack, insuring the fulfilment of every wish. Diamonds always favourable—their court cards representatives of the fairest complexions and the lightest hair—the small diamonds money and presents—the Ace—a letter.

Clubs uncertain, but occasionally favourable. Their court cards representatives of dark brown hair and pale complexions—of affection and sincerity, but sometimes wandering—the small clubs presents and money, and other minor advantages.

Spades invariably denote bad luck—sorrow, troubles and disappointment. Their court cards—the darkest complexions and blackest hair—certain presages of evil, of anger, hatred, inconstancy and revenge. The small spades, tears and troubles—the Ace—threatenings and lamentations.

There are some exceptions and modifications, as we have seen, to these rules, varying according to the relative positions of the

cards when laid out, that somewhat qualify their significations, but which we need not notice now further than to remark—that all the court cards, or a majority of them falling together when dealt out in the usual rows, is a token of approaching festivities and rejoicings. When the three Aces come together, then is the *summum bonum*—the "*Grande Victoire.*"

The *modus operandi* with the Coffee Cup is altogether a different affair, though the object to be obtained is essentially the same as with the cards. A little thick coffee is poured into the cup, turned round and round, and then gently emptied into a basin, by which, if adroitly managed, the bottom and sides of the cup receive the major part of the grounds. From certain supposititious forms thus produced, the skilful fortune-teller is able to draw deductions favourable or adverse to the wishes of her customers. For instance, is there the figure of a dog displayed—then is fidelity insured them—of a cat—treachery awaits; of a carriage—they will soon go a

long journey; of a boat—a sea voyage:—a circular clear space is the never failing symbol of a wedding ring; rocks and hills—of difficulties and dangers in the way; the form of a heart—of peace and content; a drop of water left at the bottom of the cup—a tear, and so forth.

This mode of foretelling events, however, is, obviously, so uncertain and variable, that few care to stake all their hopes on so arbitrary an issue; although there are some who having a wonderful facility in discerning purses and palaces in the glowing embers, and wedding cakes in the clouds, can distinguish objects in the coffee grounds capable of the most marvellous interpretations, and which only require the sanction of perfect faith, and a prolific imagination, to be construed into dispensations of unheard of mercy, or revelations of eternal woe.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE now return to our tale. On one side of the table, as we have seen, sat the Prophetess in her straight high-backed chair, Rathère occupying a seat directly facing her. A small brass shaded oil lamp, whose sombre light left every part of the room, except just where it stood, almost in darkness, was placed between them. The book of wonders with the coffee cup and a little silver hand bell were at her elbow:—all was in order; when, taking up the cards, and throwing out all under the sevens, she pronounced certain unintelligible words of mystical import over them, and then, having cut and carefully laid them out in rows of eights, accompanying

each row with a suitable running commentary as she went on:—

"*Attendez,*" said she, placing her forefinger on the leading card—"by St. Lambert! there must be luck for us to-night, else are the heavenly aspects cheats and liars—*regardez, donc! —un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit*— ten of diamonds—*bon! beaucoup d'argent pour vous.* Ah! three Kings meeting, too; said I not 'victory was for the brave?' *Allons! un, deux, trois, quatre—peste!* the sunniest skies will overcast—*cinq, six, sept, huit —tenez, tenez!* three Queens—*La dame de pique, La dame de trêve, et La dame de cœurs*— mischief, then, brewing—brawls and blows to come. *Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit—sacre! de mal en pis!* nine of spades—danger and disappointment; but, *en arriere*— to be guarded against. *Allons! un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit*—ten of spades —you will soon go a long journey by night— *Ah! Valet de pique, en avance*—still, perils before you—to be met and overcome—*Voilà! un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit*—*te-*

nez ! hearts leading from King to Queen of spades—*oui, c'est cela*—your thoughts, are on a dark-browed maid; *ah! c'est cela, bon ! Allons ! un, deux, trois— diable ! cinq, six, sept, huit* — King of hearts next Queen of spades, surrounded by diamonds and clubs—*Ah, mon Dieu !* a fair young man has also a very good heart towards the dark-eyed maid. *Patience ! — un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit — peste !* the devil's in the cards," and, so saying, the Prophetess gathered them up, shuffled them afresh, and, having again laid them out as before, "*Voyons !*" continued she, "*un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit — pardieu ! c'est drole — La Dame de pique vis-à-vis* with *Le Roi de cœurs — tenez, tenez !* and the five, seven, and eight of hearts, and the *Valet de carreau* in their train. Then, the fair young man has a good heart also for the dark-browed maid. Ah, the Ace of hearts *en arriere*—the light man will soon go to the dark maid's house—*Patience—patience ! Voilà ! un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit —Mon Dieu !* The King of spades, King of

diamonds, two Queens, and the Knave of hearts—*bon, bon!* there will be brave revelling and rejoicing for the dark man. *Voilà!* the King of hearts *en avance*—there will be a meeting between the dark man and the light; *oui, c'est cela — Attendez! un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit—malheureusement!* the Nine of spades — then is there danger brewing—*oui, c'est cela*—a brave struggle between the fair man and the dark — and, *ma foi!* hearts between the dark-eyed maid and the fair man—her thoughts are now on him. *Chut, chut! donc,* wherefore waste your breath in curses? *Ce n'est rien! Regardez! un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, bon! six, sept—ma foi! huit —mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* the three Aces—*Grande Victoire pour vous!*"

During this exciting and edifying exposition, on the result of which hung all his dreams of happiness or misery, Rathère, with the exception of an occasional oath or ejaculation of pleasure or dissatisfaction, as the cards told for or against him, sat gaping with his mouth open, his arms folded, and his eyes

rivetted on the table, like a statue; but when the talismanic words "*Grande Victoire*" were uttered, he started as if electrified; and so great was his exultation that it seemed very doubtful whether, in the excess of his joy, he would not rush into the arms of the old hag, and embrace her for very gratitude.

"*Tenez—tenez—tenez!*" interposed the Prophetess, with as near an approach to a smile as her rigid features were capable of, "*par Dieu!* youth is so enthusiastic—'tis well: but, *voyons*—we have not done yet—ah, *ma foi!* did not Jacqueline say there would be rare luck to-night?"

"By all that's marvellous!" exclaimed Rathère, "there have been no prophecies since the days of good St. Gaugeric like Jacqueline Dodon's—by heaven! two purses, though filled with double Louis d'ors, would but ill requite her for the happiness her matchless wisdom has filled the breast of Ernest Rathère with to-night."

"Ah! did I not say," responded Jacqueline, "that fortune ever favours the brave

and generous? *c'est juste, n'est-ce pas?*" continued she, ringing the hand-bell at her side; "*Sacre!* wherefore tarries the idiot thus?"

"Ring again," said Rathère, "she has fallen, perhaps, asleep."

"*Peste* seize the lazy *coquine!*" replied Jacqueline, extending her trembling grasp towards the bell again. As she spoke, Pauline entered, received her mistress's orders by a sign, disappeared, and returned after a few minutes with a small covered jug and basin, which having placed before the Prophetess, she slunk noiselessly out of the room.

"Now then," said Jacqueline, taking the jug and pouring some of its contents into the coffee cup, then turning it round and round, and carefully draining off the liquor—"*voyons, c'est bien fait, n'est-ce pas, mon chèr?*"—

As Rathère leant over the table, intently watching the movements of The Prophetess, the light of the lamp falling full on his face, it was evident by the workings of his features how intense was the anxiety he felt in the result of an ordeal which was finally to crown

with success or overthrow all his fondest hopes — apprehensive, no doubt, lest some unpropitious omen should turn up to diminish the triumph of his "*Grande Victoire.*" — but he need not have experienced the least uneasiness—the Fates had seemingly never smiled more kindly on his wishes than that night. True, there were—as usual—rocks and rivers, and mountains and precipices calling for courage and resolution to surmount —the stealthy cat crouched beneath the feet of the faithful dog, but, while the lion slumbered, the bold tiger escaped unmolested with the prey. And there was the palpable union of two as perfect hearts as ever were seen joined together in sweet fellowship. Money was strewed about like dross—a carriage and four were in waiting for a long journey—and a gallant ship wherein to traverse the briny deep. Of course there was the precious symbol of the wedding ring? no, that was wanting!—but what of that, if there was not one tear-drop to be found?—So that, when the Prophetess put down the cup, and declared

by all the blessed saints and martyrs that "nothing was wanting but a stout heart and a lusty arm," the extravagance of Rathère's joy again knew no bounds, and was leading him into the most rapturous expressions of satisfaction, when, observing her brow slightly overcast—"How now, mother?" said he, "the heavens are without a cloud—the planets smile upon us—the oracles are all propitious; wherefore, then, is there a dark shadow on Jacqueline's brow?"

"'Tis the nature of youth, when skies are sunny, to overlook the gathering clouds on the horizon's verge," replied the Prophetess—"of age and foresight to provide against the storm."

"What mean you, mother—said you not that all was well?"

"As yet," replied Jacqueline, "the heavenly aspects are propitious; but said I not that ere six days Mars would be in opposition to Saturn? *oui, c'est cela!*—now, Ernest Rathère—mark me! you would woo and win Embourg's loveliest maid—would snatch her

from the arms of him who doats on her as few men idolize a woman. She loves you not—nay, frown not; 'tis best, 'twixt us, to tell the truth:—I say she loves you not: *ce n'est rien!* By our Lady! 'twere a foul shame if such a base-born churl as Denis Martel could blanch your cheek, or raise an angry thought: *écoutez*—if the noxious reptile that crossed your path turned to sting you, what would you do?"

"Do?" replied Rathère, stamping his heavy foot on the floor, "crush it with my heel, and hurl it from me."

"*Bon!* 'twould be a prudent act—and would but deem it just to remove, if needs must, the only bar to your happiness—ah!"

"By Hercules!" cried Rathère, striking the table with his clenched fist, "I would snap it asunder like a reed, and toss it to the winds."

"*Eh bien!*" responded Jacqueline, "'twould be but natural:—*écoutez, donc!*—the maid you would win loves another—nay, 'twixt us there should be no secrets:—that other is Denis Martel."

"Fiends of hell! what of him?" cried Rathère, "what of Denis Martel?—yes—yes! he is the reptile in my path—the only bar to my happiness—what of him, mother? speak, speak!"

"Hush—hush; this intemperate ardour else will ruin all:—*écoutez!*—nearer, nearer; he dogs your path—would sting you to the heart—and must share, if need be, the reptile's fate!"

"'Tis easier said than done," muttered Rathère, moodily.

"Nothing is difficult with the brave," said Jacqueline;—"by Saint Katherine! the Count Ferdinand D'Omburg would pledge his soul to Lucifer for such a prize!—*Ma foi!* how beautiful she looked but yesterday when she passed my gate—her apron filled with fruits and flowers for the fête—I cursed my stars that I was not a man. Think you Ferdinand D'Omburg would long brook a rival in such charms—and such a rival too as Denis Martel?—*mon Dieu!*—*mon Dieu!*"

"By Hercules! exclaimed Rathère, fu-

riously, "I'd give a thousand louis to meet him face to face again to-night, alone.

"That may you do," replied Jaqueline, in a hoarse whisper, leaning forward and lowering her voice, "and not be out of pocket ten *centimes* — he will pass the Montagne de Flandre before an hour on his way home."

"Hark!" said Rathère, with a sudden start, and turning deadly pale, "heard ye not something?"

"*Tenez — tenez! ce n'est rien?*" ridiculed Jacqueline, casting a glance round the room —"only the wind moaning in the chimney— *allons!*"

"He will pass the mountain—*c'est vrai,*" continued Rathère, recovering from his agitation, "but not alone, mother."

"My life for it, he will have no companion but his own sweet thoughts," said Jacqueline. "Think you he will quit his mistress till he has pledged her in a parting cup of the old man's ale—no, no—his comrades of Ninanne will all have long passed the mountain before Denis has found it in his heart to

tear himself away:—*ma foi! mon chèr*, but thou art in rare luck to-night."

"*C'est juste!*" ejaculated Rathère, "musing on something passing in his mind, "*Oui, c'est juste*, mother — by the holy rood! this night shall rid me of that reptile."

"Nay," said Jacqueline, "I counselled not violence—you are rich—'tis a prize worth playing for — perhaps, for gold, Denis might quit these mountains and enlist in foreign service:—the Liégois love fine women, but full purses more."

"*Chut—chut!*" exclaimed Rathère, "you know not Denis — 'twould be but a forlorn hope *that* to trust to—as well might Jacqueline Dodon seek to make the Maid of Embourg her proselyte — no, no — mother, I tell you Denis must be otherwise provided for."

"*Peste* take them both! they might be safe wrapped in their shrouds for aught of good they ever were to Jacqueline."

"Hark! there again," whispered Rathère, pointing to the recess.

"*Diable!* the thought of Denis Martel unnerves the stoutest champion of Liége."

"By the Mother of Jesus! I saw the curtain move."

"*Tenez, tenez — possible*—some famished rat, may be, at work upon the hangings."

"There again — hark!" persisted Rathère, the blood completely forsaking his cheeks, "may I perish if the curtain did not move."

"*Sacre diable!* plague take the vermin," cried the Prophetess, rising from her chair, and striking the curtain with her crutch—"there, there—*restez tranquille—ce n'est rien! Ah, mon Dieu!* this rheum," continued she, recovering from a frightful paroxysm of coughing into which the exertion of allaying her companion's fears had again thrown her, "*mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* 'twill be my death—*voyons! quelle heure est-il? ma foi! deux heures moins vingt minutes.* Stay—the night air blows raw across the mountain—a cup of wine will give thee nerve for thy walk;" saying which, she reached a stone bottle and two

glasses from the cupboard, and having placed them on the table, "*Voilà!*" said she, "drink, *mon chèr*, 'twill warm thy heart were it cold as charity—*bon, bon!* Monr. Florenville has none better in his cave—nay, spare it not—thy hand is steadier now—one more—a bumper to the health of Embourg's loveliest Maid; and, by St. Lambert! I will pledge thee—fill—fill!"

Rathère, already flushed and excited with what he had swallowed—which, whatever other extraordinary qualities it might possess, was not deficient in strength—filled the glasses to the brim—"Pledge me, mother," cried he, "to the health of Agnes Florenville and this night's success."

"Amen!" responded Jacqueline, and carrying the glass as well as her palsied hand could guide it to her lips, without spilling much more than half its contents *in transitu*, she drained the remainder, apparently with considerable relish; and following Rathère into the passage, "Farewell," said she, "why linger then; if you have need to-night of

speech with Denis Martel, 'tis time 'twere quickly done.

"Look out," muttered Rathère, "is all still abroad?"

"Safe as the sleep of death," replied Jacqueline, taking a cautious survey from the half opened door; "*allez, donc—vite, vite!*"

"Hark," whispered Rathère, as he stood lingering for an instant on the threshold, as if some doubt still troubled him—"should Denis Martel force me to a quarrel, and aught befall him in the struggle—what will people say?"

"Say?" chuckled Jacqueline, with hideous glee, "that blinded by Bacchus and the God of Love, he missed his way—and fell, like many a love sick fool has done before him, over the rocks—such things do sometimes happen to enamoured swains, eh, *mon chèr?*"

"*C'est vrai!*" responded Rathère, a ghastly smile passing over his flushed features—"till our next meeting, then, farewell, mother;" and lifting his hat to the Prophetess, he chose the most unfrequented paths till he had left

the village far behind.; when, striking into another in quite an opposite direction, through an extensive belt of woodland that divided the village of Embourg from Ninanne, he made his way, with every evil passion burning at his heart, towards the Montagne de Flandre—his thoughts, if not his hands, already stained with his victim's blood.

CHAPTER IX.

SCARCELY had Rathère got a hundred paces from her door, when the Prophetess, sinking back in her chair, gave vent to one of those infernal laughs that never boded good to any living creature. At length, having exhausted her mirth by repeated bursts of fiendish gratification, over which she seemed to chuckle with hideous joy, she drew Rathère's purse from her bosom, and, emptying its contents on the table, counted them over and over with great complacency; till, apparently satisfied with the result, she dropped the glittering treasure one by one, with trembling fingers and gloating eyes, into the purse again; then, crawling to the *escritoir*, she de-

posited it in a secret drawer, double locked it, and summoning Pauline to her assistance, returned to her repose, seemingly well contented with her night's work. "*Ma foi!*" ejaculated she, as her head sunk on her pillow—"how stands the game? ah—*Mon Dieu!* twas well played—fools will be ever fooled. —By St. Nicholas!—a rare night this—if Denis fall—the bravest gallant of Liége will be my slave—ah! 'twas wisely played—if the wild bull bite the dust—*bon!* dead men tell no tales—whichever loses, Jacqueline must win;" and with this consolatory reflection, the Prophetess, such is the blessedness of an easy conscience, soon gave the most unequivocal evidence of her entire oblivion of all mundane affairs.

Until her mistress had closed her eyes in sleep, Pauline, after her usual custom, sat crouched at the bed-side; when, having satisfied herself that the Prophetess' slumbers were deep and undisturbed, she hastened with palpitating heart to put into execution a design she had formed, which proved that, how-

ever imbecile her intellects might be, occasional bright flashes of reason could penetrate the mists and shadows in which the mind's blessed light was enveloped.

With that quickness of perception which frequently characterizes certain states of mental obscurity, a suspicion of some impending evil appears to have crossed the poor girl's thoughts from the moment she opened the door to Rathère. No doubt there was that in his looks and manner which left a disagreeable impression on her mind; and somehow associating him with her guardian angel Agnes — in whose company she had sometimes of late seen him—she could not divest herself, seemingly, of the idea that his visit to Jacqueline at so unusual an hour had some reference to the beloved object ever foremost in her contemplations, and she determined, therefore, to ascertain, if possible, what extraordinary event had brought him that night to the cottage.

With this resolution, as soon as the voices of the Prophetess and her visitor in earnest

conversation together removed all fear of a surprise, Pauline took off her shoes, crept softly through the Hag's chamber, and, listening for a moment to assure herself that all was safe, passed the inner door communicating with the recess that opened into the parlour, and stationed herself behind the black curtain. Not many minutes had she been thus concealed, when the name of Denis Martel distinctly uttered by the Prophetess, and the curses bestowed on it so vehemently by her companion, confirmed her in the belief that some calamity threatened her beloved patroness, of whose partiality for Denis she was well aware. Every moment it became more evident that her suspicions had been well grounded; and, as by degrees the fearful plot against the peace and happiness of her benefactress was unfolded, with difficulty could she restrain herself from bursting from her concealment and venting the rage that agitated her by some signal act of vengeance and defiance, when the sudden tinkling of the hand-bell compelled her to quit her post.

Having executed her orders, she stole back again to the recess just as the ambuscade on the *Montagne de Flandre* was being managed by the Prophetess. A terrible conviction of the truth flashed in a moment across her brain, and an involuntary ejaculation of horror, impossible altogether to suppress, escaped her. This it was that first startled Rathère, and when presently afterwards the whole conspiracy was laid bare, her emotion was so great as to cause her to start as if the assassin's poignard had been plunged in her own breast, by which the curtain was moved and Rathère's apprehensions again aroused. The approach of the Prophetess to the recess in consequence, forced her to a precipitate retreat; but she had heard enough to convince her that the welfare of Agnes Florenville was at stake, and the fate of her lover perhaps beyond her power to avert: still, for her beloved benefactress' sake she would endeavour to warn him of his danger, or perish in the attempt.

Having again assured herself that the Pro-

phetess had sunk into deep unbroken sleep, and fearing to awake her if she opened either of the doors that led into the street, Paulîne crept back noiselessly to her garret; and having put on a loose figured cotton jacket or *camisole* over her red striped petticoat, she tied the bed clothes together, and fastening one end to an iron hook over the window frame, took a firm hold with both hands, and let herself down with the greatest ease till she stood safely on *terra firma;* when, regardless of every thing but the one, sole, all-absorbing object in view, she ran at full speed towards Monr. Florenville's house, in the vague hope that, if Agnes had not retired to rest, she might warn her, unobserved, of the perils that surrounded her: but she was disappointed — Nor sound, nor sign of life, disturbed the profound stillness that reigned throughout the village—its weary inhabitants had all long since gone to their repose, to realize again in blissful dreams, no doubt, the never to be forgotten delights and triumphs of the past day;—the feeble glimmering of a

night lamp was alone observable in Mademoiselle Florenville's chamber:—what should she do:—it was evident that Denis had left Embourg—he might have reached the mountain — perhaps was even now within the assassin's grasp—what should she do? Almost mechanically she stooped, and picking up some small pebbles, threw one, then another, then another against Agnes' window; when, to her inexpressible joy, the curtain was presently drawn aside, and the beloved object of her solicitude appeared at the open casement.

"Ah, Pauline, my poor child!" exclaimed Agnes compassionately, "what brings you from your warm bed at this early hour? ah! you came to see the dancing, and dread Jacqueline's anger—do not fear—I will intercede for you—Jacqueline shall not beat you. No? then you have not had your supper and are hungry—no? nor cold, nor unhappy?—yes, you are unhappy—poor child? you shall come to Agnes after mass, and tell her all your troubles'

"Denis—Denis!" implored Pauline, point-

ing first in the direction of the mountain, then of Jacqueline's cottage—*vite, vite!*"

"Denis, *ma pauvre petite* — Denis Martel? Ah, what of Denis—yes, yes, he has but just left us—you met him; but he is too generous to be unkind to Pauline."

The poor idiot understood what was said to her, but had no power to express the torrent of mingled feelings that were struggling at her heart. Stamping her feet, and throwing back her long jet black tresses from her forehead, her usual habit when under the influence of strong emotions, she could only repeat, "Denis — Denis, *vite—à la Montagne, vite, vite!*" and stood gazing in piteous agony on the beautiful face of her benefactress.

"*Pauvre enfant!*" said Agnes mentally, "her mind is wandering—go home, poor child —it is time we both sought rest. Jacqueline will let you come and see me after mass; if not, I will come and see you, and will bring the new cap and *camisole* I promised you. Nay, farewell! the night air else will steal away all my roses—farewell, poor child!"

"Denis — Denis — *à la Montagne — vite, vite, vite!*" cried Pauline, as Agnes, kissing her hand in token of present adieus, closed the casement; and casting a last supplicating look on the chamber that contained the only being she loved on earth, and dashing away the tears that rolled down her pale cheeks, she set off again at full speed towards the dreaded mountain.

"Denis — *vite, vite*" mentally repeated Agnes to herself, as she composed herself to sleep, "what could the poor child be thinking of—her mind is evidently wandering again — ah, *pauvre fille!* Denis, Denis, *à la Montagne—vite*"—and sinking into a sound slumber, with her heart full of compassion for her *protegée*—she dreamt that Denis was in the midst of a wood, surrounded by a flock of ravenous wolves which were about to tear him in pieces, when an angel, clad in a dazzling white vesture from head to feet, with wings of silver, and beautiful hair falling in long glossy tresses down her back, rose from the earth, and waving her hand, in a moment

the wolves ran howling and dispersed, till reaching the rocks they rushed headlong over them into the deep dark flood beneath. The scene changed—and Ernest Rathère was kneeling by her side, imploring her to fly with him:—a boat lay moored by the river side, in which sat two rowers with Jacqueline Dodon at the helm, ready to bear her away for ever from her home: she wept and struggled to release herself from their grasp, but they covered her face to drown her cries, and had dragged her to the water's edge, when the same angelic form that had rescued Denis in the wood stood before her. In an instant Rathère and boat and crew disappeared beneath the flood, and she was left on the shore alone. Again, she was in her father's garden with Denis by her side—it was their nuptial day—and Denis was twining a wreath of orange blossoms in her hair—the bells were ringing joyously—the wedding procession was formed—the good Curé was waiting to link them for ever in one indissoluble bond of mutual love and felicity; but

he was not like their own beloved village pastor—he was much taller, and stouter, and darker, and not so kind and benevolent of aspect—his surplice, too, was black, and there was an expression in his gaze that made her blood run cold:—he read the service in a deep sepulchral tone, and when Denis advanced to place the ring on her finger, his voice faltered—in a moment, with the rapidity of lightning, his arm was raised, the glitter of a poignard flashed for an instant before her, and Denis fell pierced to the heart at her feet:—the black surplice was gone, and the giant form of Ernest Rathère disclosed, regarding with fiend-like triumph the lifeless body of his rival."

But we must leave the Maid of Embourg to her slumbers, for it is now time we overtook Denis, who, after certainly the happiest day of his life, was carolling his way home far blither than any lark that ever greeted with its joyous song the approaching morn.

Having, as Jacqueline rightly conjectured, accompanied Agnes to her home after the

ball, and gladly accepted Madame Florenville's invitation to step in and take a parting cup before they separated, the time passed so agreeably that his companions had all set out on their return to Ninanne long before he could find it in his heart to tear himself away from his betrothed. At length the last tender adieus having been exchanged, he started off for his walk across the mountain in that transporting state of mind—that exquisite buoyancy of heart which, beyond all other causes, results from the delicious consciousness of loving devotedly, and being as devotedly loved in return. If there is one state of the human heart fraught with more ecstatic delight than another it is this;—there is no earthly joy comparable with it, and, where the object is worthy, none more pure or permanent. Denis could hardly contain himself for joy—and with good reason, for he had received the most triumphant confirmation of his fondest hopes;—the avowal of his passion had been made—the sacred pledge of mutual love and constancy exchanged—Agnes Flo-

renville would be his:—rapturous thought! 'was not this enough to make him on the best' terms with himself and at peace with all the world? Not a word had he mentioned to Agnes of his encounter with Rathère, for, as she made no allusion to the subject herself, he had no desire to recall recollections painful to them both, and which might have thrown a cloud over their happiness. As to any feeling of resentment towards his rival, there was not a particle in his breast; indeed, the only sentiment he felt was one of unbounded gratitude for the cause that had so securely established him in his mistress' favour. Cheerfully would he have clasped Rathère's hand—nay, almost taken him into his arms at that moment, and buried in oblivion every angry feeling that had ever passed between them:—with the usual generous impulse of a noble nature in the hour of success, animosity towards his enemy had no share in his self-congratulations—nay, he was one of the first he would have been delighted to number among his friends—to share his joy,

and be a witness of his good fortune. So, on he went, conjuring up in his imagination a thousand blissful visions of unfailing prosperity—now whistling, now bounding forward as if he trod on air, now singing snatches of favourite native airs, while the echoes rang again with his melodies—till, arriving at three cross paths that branched off within fifty paces of "*Le Jardin Anglais*,"—one along the wood-side towards Henne and Chèvremont, another running through a narrow defile cut out of the solid rock in the direction of Chaudfontaine; the other stretching away round the mountain's brow through a rugged gloomy bridle path, overshadowed by luxurious hedges of thorn and hazel, to Ninanne,—he paused for a moment to take breath, and to pay a passing tribute of respect to the English graves; then, springing forward again with renewed vigour, he pursued his way, shouting at the top of his voice the little Notary's favourite

"Heureux villageois dansons
Sautez, fillettes

Et garçons!
Unissez vos joyeux sons,
Musettes
Et chansons!"

when at an abrupt turning of the path, difficult of descent from its extreme ruggedness and steepness, and hemmed in so completely by almost impervious thickets of young oak and hazel trees as to form quite "the close dungeon of innumerous boughs"—affording as favourable a spot for an ambuscade as could well be chosen—he was suddenly seized from behind by a powerful arm, and the next moment the gigantic figure of Ernest Rathère stood beside him.

"Ah!" cried Denis in amazement, and disengaging himself by a sudden effort from the iron grasp of his adversary, "what means this dastardly attack of Monr. Rathère's?"

"Vile hound! did I not say," gasped Rathère, making another spring at his rival, "that we should meet again where there would be none to interrupt us—defend yourself, for, by the mother of Jesus! you shall not escape me twice."

"Villain!" exclaimed Denis, parrying the deadly blow that was aimed at him, "would you add murder to your crimes?"

"*Sacre diable!*" growled Rathère, grinding his teeth, "I came not here to parley with such a reptile, but thus to crush him beneath my feet:—down! down!".

"Ah! sayest thou so?" said Denis, "then, may God defend the right!"—and closing with his terrible foe, for some time his agility and cool undaunted courage were more than a match for Rathère's superior strength; but such an unequal contest, with no other weapons than those which nature supplied, could not be long maintained with advantage to the weaker party: Denis's strength at last failed him, and after a fearful struggle he fell, stunned by the heavy blows of his ferocious antagonist, who, driven to fury by the formidable opposition he had met with, rushed on his prostrate victim, and dragging him up the steep bank and through the adjoining thicket, paused not till he had reached the brow of one of the tremendous cliffs that

there overhang the valley on either side; when, raising him from the earth with both hands, he held him with demoniacal triumph suspended for a moment in the air, and was about to hurl him over the precipice, when a piercing scream of agony echoed through the mountain, and a female figure with long black dishevelled hair falling down her neck and shoulders appeared, scrambling with desperate and agonizing efforts up the rocks.

Paralyzed by this unexpected apparition, Rathère let go his hold of his victim, and starting back, his foot slipped, when, falling with all his immense weight on a projecting ledge of the rock, it gave way beneath him—tottered—swayed for an instant to and fro, and with a frightful crash fell headlong with its burden thundering down the precipice, till, reaching the bottom with its companion, it was crushed into a thousand atoms.

Another wild cry, not of anguish, but of joy and triumph rang from hill to hill, and the next instant Pauline was kneeling by the still insensible form of Denis Martel. With

the sagacity that marked all her actions, the poor girl, having loosened his cravat, placed her hand on the region of the heart, and finding that it still pulsated, ran to a brook that trickled along one of the mountain paths close by, and soaking a handkerchief in the water, returned, supported his head on her knee, and continued to bathe his lips and temples, till at length after several deep heavings of the chest, to her inexpressible joy his eyes gradually unclosed, and raising himself on one arm, he stared bewildered and amazed around him. He had an indistinct recollection of having been engaged in a deadly conflict with some one—of having fallen to the earth, and being dragged over some rough uneven surface: the Herculean figure of his rival, likewise flitted before him, but, besides this, he knew nothing, beyond the confused consciousness of having been suddenly attacked and as suddenly compelled to defend himself till, overpowered, all sense deserted him. His surprise may, therefore, be better imagined than described, when, with returning reason,

he became aware that he was lying on the cliff's verge, his adversary gone, and Pauline kneeling, like a ministering angel, by his side. The whole seemed a frightful dream; but when, by her signs and vague ejaculations, easily interpreted by those accustomed to them, he discovered Rathère's lifeless body lying crushed into an unshapen mass at the cliff's foot, the whole fearful tragedy was at once revealed, and he shuddered, as well he might, not so much at the thought of his own miraculous escape, as of the signal act of retributive justice, under an ever watchful Providence, which had overtaken crime in the very moment of its commission with so condign a punishment—had arrested the assassin's arm, and plunged him into the very grave he had intended for his victim.

Being, at length, sufficiently recovered from the effects of the injuries he had received to pursue, though not without pain and difficulty, his way homeward; Denis, his heart swelling with gratitude towards the poor idiot girl who had evinced so much consideration

for him, and whose presence at so critical a moment had undoubtedly saved him from a frightful death, would have persuaded her to accompany him to Ninanne, and make his home for the future her asylum.

"You have saved my life, Pauline," said he, "what can I best do to prove my gratitude to you?—you shall go with me to Ninanne, where a happy home and kind friends who will take care of you, and give you everything you want, await you—yes—yes—you will come with Denis—and you shall be a companion for my little Lilie, and take charge of her; and she will love you because you have been good to Denis, and you shall sometimes take her to Embourg to see Agnes, and Agnes will often come to Ninanne, and we shall all be so happy!—yes, you shall never be the slave of cruelty again—if Jacqueline should have discovered your absence, she would be angry and beat you—there is no one to be angry with Pauline at Ninanne: nay, if you cannot come with me now, I will fetch you myself to-morrow—Agnes will be

rejoiced to know you are going to live with Denis at Ninanne, where you will never be beaten more."

While Denis was speaking, Pauline stood motionless, her eyes filled with tears, till he mentioned the beloved name of Agnes; when starting as if from a dream, she gazed wildly around her—as if for a moment undetermined how to act—then seizing his hand and pressing it first to her lips, then to her heart—in token of her eternal gratitude and fidelity, "*Les Gendarmes—les Gendarmes!*" cried she pointing down the precipice towards the spot where Rathère's body lay—"*vite—vite—vite—à Embourg—je vais, je vais!* and dashing back her hair from her forehead with both hands, in a moment Denis was left alone watching with indescribable sensations of pity and admiration the retreating form of the generous girl hastening towards the only spot she seemed to love on earth– for there dwelt the sole object of her sympathies. Had Agnes been at Ninanne, probably she would never have retraced her steps to Jacqueline's

wretched garret; as it was that garret was a palace of content compared with all other places in her estimation; for from its narrow window she had what was to her eye the most charming of prospects — a distant glimpse of Monr. Florenville's gardens, in which she could sometimes discern her patroness walking or arranging her flowers, and she would not have exchanged the luxury of these occasional blissful visions, amidst the dark routine of her cheerless destiny, for all the indemnifications that could have been offered her: she would have submitted patiently to ten thousand times greater hardships than were daily heaped on her by the tyranny of her cruel taskmistress, rather than by complaint or murmur incurred the risk of forfeiting the only charm that made life endurable.

Denis had continued gazing at the retreating form of the poor idiot girl till an angle of the road branching off to Embourg hid her from his sight; when turning with a sickening feeling which he could hardly overcome from the spot where he stood — fraught as it was

with such appalling recollections — he cast a last shuddering glance towards the shapeless corpse of his ill-fated rival, and, breathing a prayer for his pardon and peace, hastened as well as his strength would allow towards his home.

CHAPTER X.

THE morning was fast breaking; but as yet no note of bird, nor crow of cock, nor tread of *Ouvrier* going to his daily labour disturbed the universal stillness that reigned around. Faint and exhausted Denis at length reached his own threshold; and unwilling to disturb the house at so early an hour, lifted the latch, ascended noiselessly to his chamber, and, throwing himself on his bed, in a few moments had sunk into a deep lethargic sleep. How long he might have lain in this state of unconsciousness is uncertain—nature seemed fairly to have yielded to the shock it had received, and to have sought in complete oblivion its surest restorative. The usual hour of the

morning-meal had long passed, but still he slept on: when suddenly an unusual clamour and commotion in the street, accompanied by loud voices in eager altercation and murmurs and exclamations as if all the village were in arms, aroused him from his slumbers. Instantly the terrible events of the past night rushed across his memory, and with a presentiment of some impending evil weighing at his heart, he hastened to the window, beneath which stood two mounted *Gendarmes* just arrived — in their dark blue regimental coats, buff leather breeches and belts, high jack boots and horse hair helmets. Scarcely had he time to arrange his dress when heavy footsteps, followed by the cries and lamentations of Monr. and Madame Martel, approached his door—the next moment an officer with drawn sword entered the room, and having demanded if his name was Denis Martel, arrested him for the murder of Monr. Ernest Rathère, son of Monr. Emanuel Rathère of Les Battes.

Protestations, indignant denials, explana-

tions, tears and pathetic appeals were alike unavailing. It was a matter of perfect indifference to the officers whether it was Denis Martel or any one else: he might, for all they knew, be spotless as the Virgin or guilty as Satan—it was all one to them:—the order for his arrest had been issued, and it was their interest as well as duty to make him their prisoner with all possible dispatch.

And here let us pause for a moment to pay a passing tribute of respect to the members of a force, than which, considering the arduous and important nature of their duties, it would be difficult to produce any superior, either at home or abroad, for intelligence—urbanity—untiring energy—the most patient endurance, and admirable discretion, often under circumstances of almost intolerable provocation and oppression. The uncompromising foes of villany and vagabondism, the law's keenest and most efficient tools, the butt of never ending popular odium; hated, maligned, and ridiculed—overworked—underpaid, underrated, and forgotten alto-

gether when their services are past, the *Gendarmerie* still patiently and cheerfully pursue their laborious tasks with integrity and zeal. Chosen, generally, for well approved services from the ranks in which they have probably served as veterans with distinguished credit, they are usually a superior class of men in whom trust can be reposed; but, valued as their services would seem to be, and seldom known to abuse the confidence reposed in them, after a life of unexampled hazard and hardships — unflinching fidelity, and steady devotion to the interests of their employers and the community at large, they are cast off, when they can be no longer useful, ofttimes without even the smallest provision for their old age—forgotten, unpitied, and unprovided for.

Those at all conversant with the machinery of the foreign Police well know the all-important duties that fall within the daily province of the *Gendarmerie*, and how ably and indefatigably they are fulfilled—how indispensable are their services, and how ef-

ficiently they are performed by that excellent but ill appreciated force—how admirable are its regulations, how praiseworthy the conduct of its members—how patiently, nay, how humanely they exercise the powers invested in them, in the teeth of every insult and indignity—how, ever in readiness, they are called on night and day to undertake, without a murmur, the most dangerous and heart-rending expeditions—how they have to track the robber to his cave, and drag the ferocious murderer from his hiding place—tear children from their parents, husbands from their wives, and often, in their pursuit of guilt, to involve innocence in tears and endless misery: how they have almost all been well tried soldiers, gallant defenders of their country's cause—how often they have fought and shed their blood in its defence; and yet, acknowledgedly valuable as their services have been, they are ungratefully dismissed at last, without even the compensation or compassion awarded in merry England to a superannuated parish beadle. Ought this to be? surely, ingratitude,

to say the least, like this is a scandal to governments that make a boast, and not without reason, of the infallibility of their Police.

"Hold—hold!" cried the poor mother, wringing her hands in an agony of grief and consternation, as the irons were about to be fastened on the wrists of her child, "he is not guilty—no, no! he is innocent as the poor old man his father there:—my God! my God! to think that I should have lived to see the day when child of mine was accused of murder!—Neighbours, will you stand by and see Denis, who never even so much as thought harm of any living creature in his life, arrested for murder?—The marks on his face and hands were done in self-defence—this is too monstrous an accusation — O my son, my son!"

Loud were the murmurs that passed from mouth to mouth: not a heart in Ninanne but bore willing testimony to the goodness and gentleness of Denis, and acquitted him of the crime with which he was charged; but the law was all-powerful;—to offer resistance or

expostulation would be useless—it must have its course; and soon Denis would be restored to them freed, no doubt, from every charge.

As for Denis himself, confident in the consciousness of his own innocence, he stood unmoved. For himself he had no fears, relying on his ability to disprove without difficulty the revolting accusation made against him; but his heart bled for his aged parents; and when his mother, at the last moment, threw herself into his arms,—as he kissed her cold cheek while she wept aloud on his shoulder—in spite of all his heroism tears filled his eyes as he pressed her to his bosom, and even the officers, accustomed to witness every possible variety of domestic misery, were hardly proof against a scene calculated more perhaps than any other to excite sympathy, even in the most callous and obdurate.

"*Allons!*" at length said they, "friends, farewell! If the young man is innocent, he will receive no injury at our hands:—*allons, donc!*"

"Farewell, Denis!" cried a hundred voices.

"Farewell! dear friends and neighbours all!" replied Denis, smiling cheerfully on all around him, and marching handcuffed between the Gendarmes, he was led away like a felon to Liége.

At the time we are considering, the processes of the law were issued and enforced with a celerity and arbitrariness which would ill accord with modern notions of even-handed justice. The transit from accusation to trial from trial to condemnation, and from condemnation to execution was often conducted with a dispatch that spoke little regard for the liberty of the subject; and it was no unusual thing for a suspected party opposed by wealth or power to walk from the tribunal, with barely the intermediate lapse of eight and forty hours, to the scaffold or the block. To be placed within the grasp of the law, as administered during the memorable epoch under consideration, was at all times a very precarious position; but the condition of the unfortunate prisoner circumstanced as Denis, was perilous in the extreme.

Knowing, as the reader does, all the facts of the case, it is unnecessary to dwell in detail on the trial of Denis Martel, or to give any particular relation here of the evidence adduced thereon for and against him:—the archives of Liége will doubtless supply him with the fullest information, if he desire it, on the subject; though whether the fruits of his search will repay him for the pains and labour of rummaging them out, is a matter for himself alone to determine.

Thus much, however, it is necessary to state, as regards the evidence on that extraordinary trial:—early on the morning of the supposed murder, the lifeless body of Ernest Rathère was found at the foot of the rocks, so frightfully disfigured as at first hardly to be recognized. Certain marks of violence on his person which would not have resulted from a mere fall, together with the abstraction of his purse, containing a considerable sum in gold which was known to have been in his possession the day before, were conclusive proofs in the minds of his friends that

he had not fallen over the precipice accidentally, as was conjectured by some, but had been enticed in a state of intoxication across the mountain, assassinated, robbed, and thrown over the cliff. He had been seen going in the direction of the Montagne de Flandre from Embourg, after the ball, evidently much excited, a short time before Denis Martel left Monr. Florenville's house; and it was well known that considerable jealousy had existed, on Madelle Florenville's account, for some time between the young men; from which it followed that Rathère had been decoyed by some accomplice—perhaps by Pauline—towards Ninanne, and, on his return, waylaid by Denis Martel;—and this supposition seemed to be corroborated by the recent marks of violence on Denis' face and hands, showing that he had been engaged in a desperate struggle with his victim; as likewise by the discovery of his cap in the thicket within a hundred paces of the cliff's brow. All these circumstances taken together, left no doubt in the opinion of the Court of his

guilt. True, Pauline's testimony went far, in the estimation of many, to put a totally different construction on the whole affair, and to satisfy them that Rathère was the real criminal, and had only met the fate his crimes deserved. But the evidence of an acknowledged idiot was inadmissible in a court of justice — the friends of the murdered man were wealthy and powerful—of the accused comparatively poor and powerless — Denis was pronounced guilty—condemned, and his execution ordered for the Monday following, exactly six days after his doom was fixed.

CHAPTER XI.

IT would be more painful than interesting to dwell at length on the distressing scenes that followed Denis' condemnation. The overwhelming sensation produced by the result of his trial may be easier imagined than described. Over the once peaceful and happy villages of Ninanne and Embourg, in particular, it fell, as may be supposed, like a withering blight—carrying with it dismay and mourning to every hearth. At first, so preposterous seemed the bare supposition of the guilt—so incredible the conviction for murder of one whose whole life and conduct had been an almost blameless course of goodness and usefulness, that his friends and neighbours

refused to believe it possible, and vented their indignation in loud murmurings and threats; but, as by degrees the certainty of his committal, and its inevitable consequences, became each hour more confirmed, every eye and heart were turned in sorrowing sympathy and commiseration towards the aged parents—the woe-stricken old man and woman—whose grey hairs, after a long life of unwearied toil and pains taking for the weal and happiness of their children, were thus so soon to be dishonoured, and brought by the terrible sacrifice of their first and best beloved to an untimely grave.

They, poor things! bore the load of grief and shame that was crushing them, with the unmurmuring submission of true piety; or, it might be that they had no power to complain—that the vanquished spirit, prostrated—and paralysed, could not rally from the shock under which it had sunk. They had no resource in their mutual weakness but to lean for support upon each other—to hold deep but unutterable converse by looks and tears

with each other's hearts — a converse not of words, but of mutual thoughts and meanings too harrowing for expression, and whose interpretation hearts such as theirs alone could understand. With their hands locked together, like their hearts, they would sit—that poor old couple! for hours in silence, as if motionless and stupified; nor could all the affectionate endeavours of their dearest friends rouse them to the consideration of the blessings yet remaining to them, or draw from them more than the same oft repeated *"Mon pauvre garçon—mon brave garçon—Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!"*

As for Denis, lodged in his cell, a convicted felon, a murderer in the eyes of the world—no wonder that all sense of reflection seemed to have forsaken him. Staggered—overwhelmed by the dreadful events of the past day, it was some time before he could bring his mind at all to contemplate his true position, much less realize the dread idea that in a few days he was to suffer a violent and ignominious death; but when by degrees

the truth in all its frightful reality was unfolded, and the recollection of his trial and its results burst anew upon his thoughts, reason seemed again to have deserted him, as, giving himself up to all the bitterness of despair, he broke forth into violent accusations of the injustice of his judges, and the cruelty of Heaven. In this condition he remained till the arrival of Monr. and Madame Martel to visit their unhappy child for the last time, was announced to him by the gaoler. From that hour an entire revolution of feeling took possession of him, and gave him strength to shake off the dark spirit that enthralled him. To dwell on this his parting interview with his beloved parents would be a theme too melancholy, and which may be much better conceived than depicted. It is doubtful for whose sufferings the sympathizing heart of an eye witness of that scene of misery would have more bled, for the parents' or the child's. But Denis was again left to himself. That night he slept sound as if he had been in his own happy bed at Ninanne; and his dreams

were full of blissful visions—for, before he threw himself on his hard pallet, on his knees, and with heart and soul entirely dedicated to the sole will and pleasure of his God, he had cast his burden on Him who alone had power to remove, or give him strength to bear it. The next morning he arose composed and cheerful; nor, from that hour to the night preceding the fatal day fixed for his last and severest earthly trial, (such is the all powerful efficacy even in the most appalling circumstances of perfect trust in Divine goodness) was complaint or murmur once heard to escape his lips.

But all this time what said Agnes?—did she believe her lover guilty? Oh, no! well she knew that he was as innocent of the dreadful crime laid to his charge as the Angels of light. From the moment that Rathère's fate reached her, the whole fearful truth, confirmed as it was by Pauline's testimony, was as vividly apparent as if she had been a spectator of the frightful scene. Twice did she, in the extremity of anxiety, force

herself into the presence of Monr. and Madame Rathère, and on her knees endeavour to exculpate her lover, and implore their pity and intercession; but they shrunk from her as the cause of their affliction — the fatal siren that had lured to destruction their beloved child:—her beauty, her tears and supplications availed only to strengthen their detestation of those evil fascinations, to the pernicious influence of which on their son's affections they attributed his cruel and untimely loss.

As the hour of death and eternal separation drew nearer and nearer, and all hope seemed at an end, it was evident that if Agnes, like Denis, with the pious resignation of a true Christian spirit, bowed to the will of an inscrutable Providence, her submission was the uncomplaining lamentation of a breaking heart. One thought yet supported her, and in the teeth of despair itself had power to sustain the spirit from total darkness—"Would a just God, from whom no secrets were hidden, and at whose tribunal

there was ever mercy and justice, suffer the guiltless to perish thus in his innocence?" On this thought built Agnes all her trust—human aid could do nought for her—like Denis, like all who have found in the hour of extreme trial the insufficiency of earthly resources to sustain or solace the drooping soul, she cast her burden on Him who alone could remove, or give her strength to bear it.

As for Pauline, from the moment that Denis' condemnation was made known to her, her faculties seemed to have sustained their last and severest shock. The little remaining reason of which her mind had occasionally given evidence, seemed fast deserting her. All Jacqueline's wrath and menaces were ineffectual to fix her attention or make her mindful of her duties. Nearly the whole day was spent in wandering restlessly from place to place, or pacing backwards and forwards with frantic wildness before the gaol in which Denis was confined, in vain endeavouring to gain admittance to his cell. Several times had the Prophetess, incensed at

her disobedience, after beating her severely, locked her in the *grenier* and kept her without food, but as often had she effected her escape by the window, and set at nought every effort to restrain her. The gentle tones of her beloved young mistress' voice—alas! but seldom addressed to her now—were the only charms that had any power to recall her for an instant to reflection; and even these appeared to be losing their influence as the fatal hour for Denis' execution advanced.

On the day preceding that appointed for poor Denis' last earthly trial, Pauline had not been seen by any of the villagers since sunrise, when she was observed wending her way with her usual frantic eagerness towards Liége. Not returning at her usual time, various were the surmises as to what had befallen her. Some thought she had strayed into the woods, and, overcome by care and fatigue, fallen asleep during her wanderings; others, that in a fit of madness she had found a refuge from all her troubles in the deep dark waters of the Meuse; others, that dis-

appointed in her endeavours to gain admittance to Denis, she was lingering about the gaol in the delusive hope that every moment would bring the order for his liberation, and that she should be the first to carry the joyful news of his return to Agnes :—but to none was the absence of the poor idiot a source of so much anxiety and uneasiness as to the Maid of Embourg herself, who, perhaps, feeling sensible of having, in the selfishness of her own all-absorbing grief, too much neglected the unhappy girl, considered she was almost responsible for any harm that might befall her. At length, late in the afternoon, exhausted by toil and wretchedness, she entered the back door of Jacqueline's cottage, and was creeping up to her garret, when the Prophetess, hearing her footstep, called her in an apparently compassionate tone to come to her. Silently and sullenly Pauline obeyed the summons, and entering her bed chamber, "Ah!" cried Jacqueline, "so you have come back at last, *ma petite—bonne fille — brave enfant!* come and kiss me, and have your sup-

per, then—*Mon Dieu!* but the poor child must be hungry—nay, you will not come and kiss Jacqueline for some nice *eau sucré* and a *tartine?—tenez—tenez!* then, Jacqueline must come and kiss Pauline"—saying which, the Hag made a sudden spring with her long shrivelled arm towards the wretched girl, and, catching her by the hair, held her with all her might by one hand, while with the other she beat her savagely over the neck and back, till, unable from sheer exhaustion to continue her hold, she sunk back almost bursting with rage on her bed.

Not a murmur escaped the poor idiot, as she stood with one hand pressed against her burning forehead, and her eyes fixed on the floor; but the deep heaving of her chest and the swollen veins of her flushed face and throat too plainly proved how violent were the emotions that were struggling at her heart.

"A curse on such an imp of Satan!" muttered Jacqueline, scarcely able to articulate for the passion that almost choked her, and

raising herself up—"think you I will cherish such a reptile any longer in my bosom—out out, I say—out! or, by St. Lambert! Jacqueline will come and give you such another kiss shall send you to keep Denis Martel company in heaven—Ah! you have ears if not a tongue—a murrain seize such fools as Pierre Grimoald, for doing their work by halves—out, *Sotte*—out! Ah! you will not move? *sacre diable!* and, raising her crutch, she let it fall full on Pauline's head. "Ah, a bonny blow, by St. Katherine!" cried she, chuckling with gratified revenge,—"now, then, will Pauline come and have another *tartine*, and some nice *eau sucré?*" and again lifting high the crutch, it was about to descend with redoubled force, when, avoiding the intended stroke by a sudden spring on one side, the infuriated girl—goaded to madness, rushed with the fury of a tiger on her tormentor, and, forcing her back on the bed, seized her skinny throat with both hands, and, regardless of her cries and struggles, was proceeding to strangle her, when the

sound of hastily approaching footsteps compelled her to quit her grasp, and, starting up from the prostrate and almost breathless body of her persecutor, she darted out of the cottage, and, dashing back her hair from her temples, ran shrieking through the village — "*vite—vite—vite—à la Montagne — vite!*"

"Follow her—follow her!" cried voice after voice, "she is raving mad—she has killed Jacqueline—she has murdered the Prophetess!"

"*Vite—vite—vite!*" screamed the maniac, "*à la Montagne—vite!*"

"Stop her—she flies to the quarries!" shouted the villagers, collecting from all quarters.

"*Vite—vite—vite!*" continued Pauline, increasing her speed as she saw them gaining on her.

"Quick—quick! she is climbing the rocks—she will dash herself to the bottom!" cried one after the other, "*Ah, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* see how she bounds from crag to crag."

"*Vite—vite!*" was echoed from mountain to mountain.

"Stay—stay!" exclaimed a silver-haired village Patriarch in a tone of authority, "urge not the poor fugitive thus; know you not, neighbours, that the brain once lost by fright of fall is ever wandering on the giddy precipice? see you not that yonder is the very spot where the poor child was found at the cliff's foot, all but murdered by the brute Grimoald, nine years past come the feast of St. Nicholas?—by St. Mary! this rock, or Michael Voegt is mistaken, will be the scene, *pauvre enfant!* of her last struggle."

"Back—back, friends!" was repeated on every side, "hear Michael Voegt:—yes, 'tis the very rock over which she was thrown by Pierre Grimoald."

"Where is Agnes Florenville? fetch the maid of Embourg;" entreated Michael, "she will listen to her—she will come down for Agnes."

Scrambling with phrenzied terror up the precipice, the poor maniac stopped not till she had reached to within a few feet of the top; when, apparently overspent with fatigue,

she leaped on a narrow projecting ledge of the rock, so deeply excavated by the operations of the miners as to be hardly firm enough, seemingly, to sustain a much less weight, and, drawing herself up to her full height, stood, like a statue, gazing down triumphantly on her beholders.

At this awful moment of anxiety, the approach of Agnes with Monr. Florenville was the signal for an universal cry of satisfaction. Alighting—to all appearance more dead than alive—from the carriage in which, at her earnest request, her father had driven her as soon as she heard of Pauline's flight to the quarry, she beheld with consternation the critical position of the unhappy girl; and, thinking only how she could rescue her from the appalling fate that she was contemplating—in spite of every entreaty and remonstrance—hastened up the cliff by a zig-zag path which afforded the only practicable footing across the rocks, and had reached about midway when Pauline, observing an approaching form, and ignorant as yet that it was

that of her own dear guardian angel Agnes coming to her succour, suddenly started back, clasped her forehead with both hands, and, uttering a piercing shriek that made every heart tremble, was about to hurl herself headlong, as Michael had predicted, to the bottom, when the sweet musical tones of a well-known voice in accents of affectionate supplication caught her ear.

"Pauline—Pauline—dear Pauline!" implored that voice, "will you not come to Agnes?"

In an instant the wild frantic gestures of the maniac were changed into the calm placidness of a statue, as she stood riveted and gazing, as if spell-bound, on the form of her beloved patroness seemingly beseeching her to come to her embrace.

"Pauline, dear—dear Pauline!—haste, come to me, or I shall fall!" entreated Agnes, as a last resource;—it was a righteous fraud:—another wild cry—not of terror or triumph, but of surprise and joy ineffable—rent the air. Clasping her hands together as

if in an ecstasy of exulting satisfaction, the generous girl seemed in the act of leaping down to the assistance of her benefactress, when she reeled back—fell on her knees, and her head sinking on her chest, she remained immovable, as if in the attitude of prayer.

"She has fainted!" cried a hundred voices, "on, on! let us secure her before she awakes;" and bounding up the cliff several of the most active were soon by her side. Alas! her's was the sleep from which there is no more waking in this life:—her heart had ceased to beat;—the intensity of its best affections had killed her;—her troubles were over—her spirit had gone to its account. It only remained to carry her to her last home, and leave the rest—with many a heart-felt prayer—to the mercy of her God and Saviour.

The painful sensation caused by Pauline's sad fate throughout Embourg and the adjacent villages was at its height, and for a moment seemed to have diverted the thoughts of every one from the far more terrible scene that awaited them on the morrow; when, as if

to verify the popular adage that calamities never come singly, a rumour arose that the Prophetess was dying from the injuries she had received from the maniac — had, after much reluctance, sent for a Priest, and was then under confession and absolution. And so it proved to be.—With difficulty had Jacqueline been able to rise even with assistance from the bed on which she was stretched almost lifeless when Pauline rushed from the cottage, and then only to be laid on it again evidently in a dying state. Soon the news of her danger was spread all over the neighbourhood, and astonishing were the numbers that, from one motive or another, flocked round her from all quarters—many no doubt in the hope of hearing some marvellous revelations, or witnessing some miraculous proof of prophetic potency. But in this they were disappointed—doggedly and determinedly did she elude all their enquiries — fruitless were all their endeavours to engage even her attention—till the arrival of the Priest seemed to recall her to a sense of her danger, and the

necessity of losing no time in making what preparation she could for the dark perilous journey before her.

Long was the pious Curé by her bed side, praying, and exhorting, and listening to the revolting details of a life devoted to the miserable pursuits of avarice and imposture; when, hurrying in a state of great excitement from the cottage, he proceeded straight-way to the Burgomaster of the district, with whom he was for some time in close and earnest consultation.

Various and anxious were the speculations as to the nature of a confession, which, from the mysterious course of the Prophetess' life and habits, must be a disclosure of no ordinary interest. At length, when it transpired, as it very soon did, that, in addition to other grave revelations extorted from the fears of an overburdened conscience, Jacqueline had given a full and minute account of the interview between herself and Ernest Rathère on the night of the supposed murder—of the plot for Denis Martel's surprisal and assassina-

tion—and that the lost purse and its contents were in her possession—no words can convey any idea of the sensation that ran like wild fire from house to house and village to village, till the whole country for miles round rang with the eventful news—"The Prophetess of Embourg had made a confession on her death bed, absolving Denis Martel from any participation in Ernest Rathère's death. Joy—joy! a miracle of mercy—a signal interposition of an all-wise Providence to avenge the innocent!"

The sequel will easily be anticipated.—That night Jacqueline Dodon, leaving behind her enormous gains but an evil reputation—two very frequent posthumous results of an unhallowed life—breathed her last almost at the same moment that the joyful tidings of his speedy liberation and triumphant restoration to honour and happiness reached Denis.

To endeavour to describe his gratitude at this his second miraculous deliverance from the very jaws of death would be useless; it may be imagined but defies description;—

language would but ill convey any idea of the unspeakable rapture — the overwhelming joy that a reprieve must bring with it even to the guilty; how much more intensely must it affect the heart of innocence?

The following day, an investigation into all the circumstances of the case having taken place; Denis, released from every imputation, was unhesitatingly and honourably acquitted; received, amidst the acclamations of a crowded assembly, the sympathy of his judges for his undeserved sufferings, and returned loaded with praises and congratulations to his friends.

It is scarcely necessary to ask, as indeed it would be a very difficult question to answer, where all were so unanimous, whose heart most rejoiced at his good fortune? If none were prouder of the re-establishment of their child's fair fame than Monr. and Madame Martel, and with good reason; we may rest assured that no bosom swelled with a fuller sense of happiness or gratitude, than Agnes Florenville's. She remembered, when all other hope seemed sinking from under her, what

power had sustained and supported her to the last:—the rock on which she had put her trust had not failed her; and if there was a wish unfulfilled—it was that poor Pauline had been spared yet a little longer to share her grateful exultations.

Our tale is told. It but remains to add that ere another autumn had brought its golden harvests, there was another fête at Embourg and Ninanne, which, they say, for universal rejoicing surpassed, and that is saying a great deal, all the fêtes that ever had preceded it. It was the wedding day of Denis and the maid of Embourg!—the bells were ringing—the bridal favours were distributed—the procession was formed—the good Curé waiting to unite and bless them; and he was their own beloved pastor—his surplice was snow-white, and his smile benevolence itself—all was ready; why then did they tarry—why keep the good Priest waiting?—It was scandalous—it was abominable of the little Notary of Chênée—he was never yet in time:—poor Emille! they made no allowance for his tailor's

blunders.—At length, complete at all points, up he came panting and perspiring with Adolphine, looking the picture of happiness and good humour, hanging on his arm.

At first, it appears that (whether out of caprice or mischief no one could determine) she had resolutely resisted all his persuasions to become Madame Emille for at least two years to come; but when poor Emille in despair represented to her what an omen of all that was good it would be to be married on the same day as the maid of Embourg, she relaxed so far as to demand time for consideration; but the little Notary, with the tact and discernment of a true philosopher, wisely thought it much better to give her as short a time for thinking as possible; so, what should make its appearance next day at Beaufays but a box containing one of the most charming violet satin hooded mantles from Brussels—*tout à fait comme il faut*—that either blue or any other eye ever beheld. This was irresistible—could anything be more correct than to wear it for the first time on her wed-

ding day?—so, Emille's success was complete, and Denis' and Agnes' were not the only two hearts made perfectly happy that day.

"Take care now, *mon chèr*, how you behave," whispered Adolphine, as they followed Denis and Agnes into the church, "and don't make me laugh—or I'll be Madame Marc Dombret, yet, to spite you."

"Just too late, *ma chèrie*," giggled Emille, "Marc has confessed his sins—given up salads and sauterne—got absolution—turned Friar, and gone to end his days in a convent."

"*Mon Dieu!*" ejaculated Adolphine—"you have not forgotten the ring, now, have you?"

No—the ring was safe in the corner of the waistcoat pocket; as likewise, we may be sure, was the happiness of The Belle of Beaufays then and ever after in the tender care and unremitting affection of the little Notary of Chênée.

C. WHITTINGHAM, CHISWICK.

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Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 02 April, 2016